





LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

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LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

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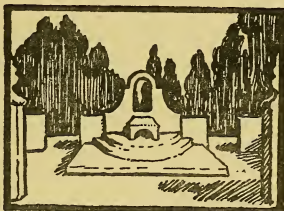
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LITTLE PLAYS of St. FRANCIS

A Dramatic Cycle from the Life and
Legend of St. Francis of Assisi, by

LAURENCE HOUSMAN

11



With a Preface by H.
GRANVILLE-BARKER

Boston
Small Maynard & Company

1922?

PR4809
H18L55
1922a

Gift
Ruth A. Eckhart
8/28/50

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PREFACE

THERE is an art of the theatre and there is a theatrical industry, and it is absurd to expect that the interests of the two can be continuously identical; it is difficult, rather, to see why nowadays they should ever coincide. Consider for a moment the current conditions of the industry as they are dominated by the London market. High rents, high rates, special taxes, high wages, high prices, the pleasure-affording public largely such a shifting one that its attraction demands much expenditure in advertisement and agency fees—what wonder that the man of business, trying to deal fairly with hard-to-come-by capital, protests that he can only afford to traffic in goods which will attract the greatest number of people to a highly purchased enjoyment of them in the shortest possible time?

The sophisticated in such matters, then, will not expect even the most enterprising London manager to pounce upon this sequence of plays setting forth the life of St. Francis of Assisi as a successor to—his latest failure. Is he to be blamed for that? He may have dropped thousands this past year in exploiting what seemed the safest sort of goods,

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plays that need tax no one's intelligence, disturb no one's complacency, upset no digestion. But, suppose he did venture, for a change, upon a religious revue, could he look to see the patient pittites lined up in their hundreds or to hear from his office during the next few months the pleasing sound of the nightly stampede for taxis, buses, and trains of a crowd purged by the pity and terror of a three hours' contemplation of this life given to God? It is, of course, unlikely; though, even in the theatrical industry, stranger things have happened.

Mr. Housman himself—as experienced in the industry as he is practised in the art—probably does not envisage any such immediate fate for these plays. But we must not conclude because of this, and because they make their first bow to the public from the printed book, that they are therefore undramatic, merely literary, more fitted for the study than the stage—because they have not been fitted to the Procrustean bed of the commercial theatre. And, while a theatrical generation ago some critics might have thought to couch praise in such terms, to-day (alas for the theatre!) it is equally foolish to use them as blame.

For there is now another theatre towards which the most practical dramatists may advisedly turn their eyes. It is not—it can never be—a financial lucky-bag; no syndicates will exploit it, landlords and ticket agents will regard it with indifference.

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To-day, truly, is its day of small things. But on that account alone it is proverbially not to be despised. Besides, the small things are multitudinous; and they show promise of many and various morrows.

Some twenty-five to fifty years ago there began (you may date its beginning according to your particular sympathies) a so-called renaissance of the English drama. If the birth was painful, the bringing-up has not been easy, and the problem of putting this new heir of the ages out into the world (so to speak) is yet to be solved. There seems little present chance of a solution upon what are called business-like lines, and even less in any appeal to the State or to private wealth for endowment and subsidy. If a national theatre will cost half a million, a national theatre may go hang. If to show school-children Shakespeare is to burden the rates with a few thousands extra a year, he may abide for them in his printed and annotated prison (save for the chance that a teacher or two of talent may be able to rescue him unaided), and the children may abide in their weary wonder at all this blank versifying and conglomeration of queer words being called, of all things in the world, a play. And what cannot be conceded to such a respectable fetish as Shakespeare it will certainly be worse than a waste of time to advocate for any merely contemporary art. Besides (we shall be told) Shake-

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spere's plays had no cockering at their birth in the shape of subsidies and official patronage, and they flourished in native unconstrained vigour. But where are now the dramatic nurslings of the Universities, where even is rare Ben Jonson? The argument is impeachable. But why argue? For it is at least true that, whatever endowment may or may not do, talk keeps no art alive. And it is also a fair question whether the demonstration of a dramatic renaissance made during these last twenty-five to fifty years by a few hundred faithful workers, supported with intermittent enthusiasm by a few thousands of the public—subsidised, in a sense, indeed—has not failed. Well, one might admit it, so far as to admit that the great heart of the people has remained untouched, that to-day one may stop half a dozen men at random in the streets of Newcastle or Huddersfield and question them upon the achievements of the modern English theatre, to find them not only abysmally ignorant but absolutely indifferent about the matter. But there are failures more fruitful than success; and we, the public, may perhaps face the London manager's balance-sheet of a three years' consistent trial of the 'serious' drama with more equanimity (though naturally he will not!) if we will look elsewhere for the victory in that rather heart-breaking struggle.

It is certainly true that under present industrial

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conditions the best modern drama cannot flourish (apart from a few strokes of luck and by a constant searching for novelty and still more novelty) in any representative variety in the West End of London, and that this inhibition takes reflexive effect throughout the country. There is the failure. The success lies in the upspringing all over England of bodies of people so hungry for a little simple, wholesome, unhocussed dramatic art, that, denied it by the professional providers, they are ready to see to the supply themselves. That they now know what they want, where to find it and how to bring it to full being—these are the true fruits, so far, of our English dramatic renaissance. We have no national theatre, and the best of our modern plays—each having had, be it said, one hard, if not long, run for its life—lie, most of the time, dusty on bookshelves. But there is hardly a town or a district of villages in England to-day that does not hold some collection of young men and women who, with their workaday world behind them, set out, now and then, to adventure together into the wider mimic life, for the deeper sympathetic experience that they can find in this simple art of acting.

Amateur dramatic societies, it is true, have existed for years by the hundred, with their seasonal exhibitions, in which 'local talent,' for the ostensible benefit of local charities, matched itself against London originals in the latest pro-

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curable London success. But these new associations have different aims and are of a different temper. They have as a rule much contempt for the commercial theatre, more indeed than befits their ignorance of its difficulties and its dormant virtues. They read the modern 'bookshelf' drama and discuss it, rightly enough, with very critical tongues. But their chief anxiety is to stand clean upon their own theatrical feet. The surest of them may disdain to derive their drama from anything but their own expressive selves; they will both write their plays and act them, paint their scenery and make the costumes, be their own audience too if necessary. Here, though—for all the theoretic merit—is but a small circle to revolve in. Others are content to turn their eyes outward for plays at least. But they will often look, if they are wise, for plays that are not modelled to the complexities and the sophistication of the professional stage. These—only the very best, of course!—might be good enough for them, but when playing becomes the question, too much of a good thing besides. It is true, also, that even the most radical writer, having reasonably enough an eye upon the conditions of his work's first employment, does tend to a set and limited scope of form and content—to one, moreover, that may be both positively and negatively unsuitable to groups of amateurs. For material resources they cannot

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command ; but, on the other hand, they are free from professional obligations as to subject, length, balance of cast, and half a dozen other minor things.

But here is a theatre for which any dramatist of to-day, with his eye upon the immediate tomorrow, may well sit down to write. In collective importance, in the persistent or recurrent interest it may show in his work, it can already rival for him the more exacting and capricious professional stage. And it promises to develop in these two directions, among others : one, of variety of interest, for another, in positive tastes.

To have an audience that liked everything would be the enterprising manager's ideal. To cater for a public that tolerates anything, as long as it is mildly entertained, is debilitating to a degree. This, though, is one of the curses laid on the London theatre. The integrated audience (such as it was) has now broken up, with the upbreking of many things more. And the manager, trying to divine the public taste—searching the entrails of many plays for the purpose—can but come to the despairing conclusion that, as there is no such comprehensible thing as a public, neither has it any definable taste. Wherefore, if he have none of his own, he revolves through chaos to prompt retirement on a run of luck, or bankruptcy. But these smaller, closer-knit units of so-called amateur interest in drama can form concrete opinions, can also, to

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some intelligible extent, express them. They are the right soil, then, for experiment. A failure to please is not a catastrophe. Moreover, the selective process by which some band of enthusiasts has just separated itself upon this matter from its neighbours (later to recruit from them) will continue in the discovery of its own particular capacities for adventure. And drama opens a wide field.

Now it cannot fail to strike one how perfectly—whether by accident or design—Mr. Housman has provided in this sequence of plays for the needs and ambitions of such players. The multiple unit is a most useful economic form. You may pass from your single play to your section and later accumulate resources to capture the whole work without any waste labour. More importantly, here is religious drama; and—if one may beg a question which each reader may claim to answer for himself—drama that is religious not in name only.

It is surely a very salient sign both of our new drama's vitality and of the fact we have alleged that its life is now truly a part of the people's life, when it turns—and quite simply and normally turns—to religion for a topic. For a topic, in that here we have living religion, not dead. The dress may be twelfth century, but if the faith were not alive and the thought immediate, neither would pass the dramatic test to which Mr. Housman has boldly put them. But let half a dozen actors,

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thinking more of their art than of themselves, and for the time being more of St. Francis than of either—let them give such life as is in them to any one of these plays, and (preface-writer's partiality apart) they will find without fail that the life of the play's art and the intenser life of its purpose will give increase tenfold. For—passing the test—that is drama's achievement and reward.

There are occasional signs that the Church in England is now bethinking her of what a weapon she threw away when she gave the theatre the go-by. She will not capture it again; it has a salvation of its own to pursue. But the drama may still offer her service; even though, in this study of the life and death of St. Francis, it be rather in despite of her more official moods. One sees, very shortly, a Guild of the Players of St. Francis being formed, with these plays for its text-book. Will they tramp, bare-footed and brown-frocked, round the English country as their prototypes tramped Italy? A char-à-banc, with an attendant lorry, might be allowable. They will be welcome for certain. They had better be ready to play in a tent by the roadside. But, as often as not, the parson may come out to meet them.

HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER.



AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE life of St. Francis of Assisi has come to us as much through legend as through history; and many tales of him which help to give us his living character are not only without historical proof, but may, strictly speaking, be untrue. To this mixed material the dramatist and the student stand in different relations; and while the latter does well to search for whatever authenticity may lie at the back of legend, the former has mainly to consider what is, or what is not in character, and will accept whole-heartedly any legendary material which serves to give life to his subject, or illustration to its main motive.

But he may, in the pursuit of dramatic values, go even further, and feel as little bound to legendary as to historical detail, if—as in the case of these plays—his main purpose is to present a spiritual interpretation of character. And so it has come about that many of the incidents round which these plays were written are purely imaginary; and, where they are not, they rest only lightly on any actual record of events.

Thus, in Part I., three historical facts—the

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imprisonment of Francis in Perugia, his subsequent illness and recovery, and his encounter with the leper—are used to give connection to a series of dramatic incidents which have otherwise no basis in history. In the play entitled ‘Brother Wolf’ I have gone back on legend, accepting the suggestion of the ‘rationalists’ that the wolf was really a man. In ‘Brother Sun’ I have omitted the ordeal by fire which Francis is reputed to have claimed as a test of his mission. In ‘The Chapter’ I have combined for dramatic purposes events which took place in two different years. In ‘Sister Death’ I have dramatised, in a scene of threatened violence, the really existing jealousy between the citizens and the ecclesiastical authorities over the possession and disposal of the Saint’s remains, whereas the only violence actually recorded occurred some while after his death. In doing so I have not taken more liberty with history than other dramatists of historical events have made customary. History is, indeed, the greatest of all works of fiction: and even its official and contemporary records lead us—and often are intended to lead us—very far from the truth.

On one point I have to admit an inconsistency from which I saw no satisfactory way of escape. In these plays, covering three phases of his career, I have given my chief character two names: in the first part he is ‘Francesco,’ an Italian like all

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

the rest. After his 'conversion' he becomes the 'Francis' to which English ears are familiar. Also to Brother Juniper I have given the name by which we know him. A dramatist has often to take what sounds best to the ear. Having to choose between 'Father Francesco' and 'Father Francis,' I took what seemed the natural course and named him as he is best known; whereas in those earlier incidents of youth, where he was but a leader of frolic and fashion, his Italian name seemed to suit best. Aiming at naturalness in each case, I have let consistency go.

Not all of these plays are intended primarily for the stage—not at least for the stage as it exists to-day; they have nevertheless all been written with an underlying sense of stage requirements and stage effect; and some of them depend so much on these that it is with some regret that I place them before readers instead of before an audience.

L. H.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

FRANCESCO BERNARDONE		<i>St. Francis of Assisi.</i>
PIETRO BERNARDONE		<i>His father.</i>
LUCIO LEONE	<i>His friend : afterwards</i>	BROTHER LEO.
RUDOLFO		<i>His rival.</i>
UBERTO	}	<i>His companions.</i>
RINALDO		
PAOLO		
GIOVANNI		
ANTONIA		<i>Betrothed to LUCIO.</i>
BALDONE		<i>Her father.</i>
LUCREZIA		<i>Her kinswoman.</i>
ARNOLFO		<i>Father of LUCIO.</i>
MARGHERITA		<i>Queen of Beauty.</i>
ISOLA	}	<i>Her attendants.</i>
JULIA		
LAURA		
CLARA DA SCIFFI		<i>St. Clare.</i>
GIACOMINA DA SETTISOLI		<i>A Roman lady of rank.</i>
POMPILIO		<i>A Commissary.</i>
LUPO		<i>A robber chief.</i>
CECCO	}	<i>His followers.</i>
BARTOL		
GIUSEPPE		
BASTIANO		

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THE PODESTA	<i>Chief Magistrate of Assisi.</i>
SOLDAN	<i>King of Egypt.</i>
DOM SILVESTRO	<i>A Priest.</i>
AN OLD MISER.	
A MERCHANT.	
A NURSE.	
A GOAT-BOY.	

Brothers of the Franciscan Order :

LEO, BERNARD, JUNIPER, ELIAS, ANTHONY, SIMON,
RUFUS, HUMBLE, ILLUMINATO, PACIFICO, JOHN,
CONRAD, GILES, JEROME, ANGELO, MATTEO.

*Citizens, Soldiers, Saracens, Slaves, Gaolers, Beggars, Robbers,
Lepers, Peasants, Masqueraders, Musicians, Revellers,
and Friars.*

PART I
THE FOREGOING

THE REVELLERS.

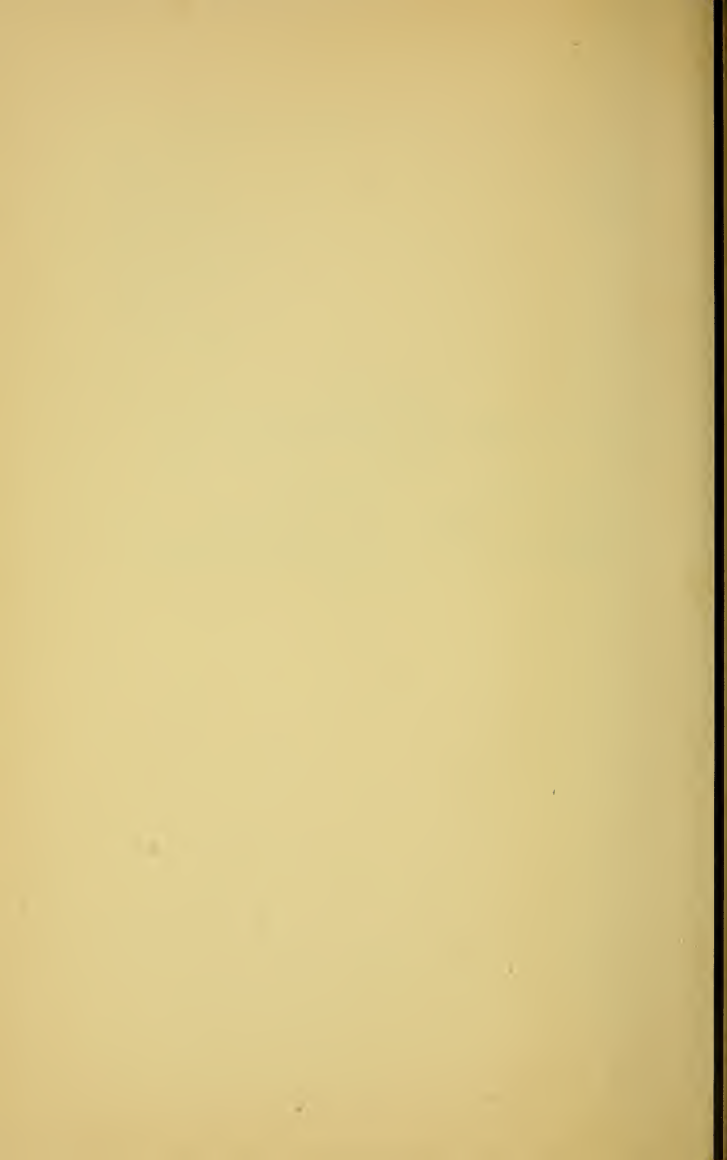
FELLOW-PRISONERS.

BRIEF LIFE.

BLIND EYES.

THE BRIDE FEAST.

OUR LADY OF POVERTY.



THE REVELLERS



It is night in Assisi, and the moon, high in heaven, blazes down into the small square with its stone fountain, upon which narrow streets converge. To one side rises the gaunt wall of a church, under which the fountain lies completely in shadow. On the opposite side (corner to a street) stands a deeply-recessed

door; above it projects a small window. At the back of the scene is the door of another and larger house. When the scene opens, LUCIO is discovered below the window of ANTONIA.

LUCIO. If it be true, confirm it yet again !
Give me to know that silence shall mean faith :
That not Rudolfo's, nor Francesco's love
Weighs in the scales with mine.

ANTONIA. I swear, I swear
I love thee, Lucio.

LUCIO. Witness to it, O moon !
And let that uttered music of her breath,
Which from this earth doth rise, be in thy keeping
Henceforth for ever !

ANTONIA. Hush ! no more : away !
Our secret keeps. I 'll look on thee by day,
And know thee not. Good night, Lucio, good night !

[She withdraws : her light is seen passing upwards.]

LUCIO. Flown ! O my bird, my star ! Up
mounts thy light,

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And Lucio's eyes go blind.

[*He crosses to the fountain, and there within a buttress of the church wall stands watching. From a distance comes the sound, as from an opened door, of laughter and revelry. A sudden gleam of light is thrown along the street. Enter PAOLO and other Revellers, followed by RUDOLFO, cloaked in black and bearing a sword. The Revellers are a little drunk. One runs ahead, hides, and, as the others go by, makes a sham pass with his sheathed sword, crying 'Moo!' His 'victim' squeaks. Loud laughter follows.*

PAOLO. To the right! To the right!
Look out for the cow's horn! Come, my Rudolfo!
We're for Perugia.

[*PAOLO and the others go off, laughing.*

RUDOLFO. Ye fools, go your ways!
I'm for Antonia.

[*He takes his stand within the recessed doorway.*
Enter FRANCESCO, strumming upon a small mandol.

FRANCESCO. Oh, sleep not so!
Let dreams now go!
For the way we know lies easy.
So make delight
Of the live-long night,
While the moon shines bright on Assisi.

[*He approaches the window of ANTONIA.*

O whitest flower,
From thy high bower
Look down this hour,—

[*RUDOLFO strikes his sword across the strings.*

THE REVELLERS

RUDOLFO. Hold !

FRANCESCO. Litter of Cerberus ! Whose black dog are you ?

RUDOLFO. Take your strings hence, strummer !
Linger not here !

FRANCESCO [*mildly surprised*]. Signor Rudolfo ?

RUDOLFO [*bitingly*]. Aye, Signor Francesco !

FRANCESCO [*trying to pass*]. Nay, by your leave !

[*RUDOLFO withstands him threateningly.*]

Why then, without your leave, to yourself I leave you !

[*He crosses to the fountain and there spies*

LUCIO.

Lucio ?

LUCIO. How now, Francesco ?

FRANCESCO. There is a black dog yonder ; and he bites.

LUCIO. Better not cross him ; he is dangerous.

FRANCESCO. Yet will I tame him ! See, here is the wine

That wins my wager : Uberto and padrone,
Both have I beaten !

[*From his girdle he unslings a wine-skin.*]

LUCIO. Thou art a thief, Francesco !

FRANCESCO. Aye, till to-morrow : then will I make payment.

Set it to cool, here in the fountain, Lucio.

LUCIO [*reaching down*]. The well is dry.

FRANCESCO. Excellent ! Pour it in !

We 'll make a miracle of it for San Rufino,—

Blood from his bones. Tasting, how they will stare !

LUCIO. What is this for ?

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FRANCESCO. Go on! Do as I tell thee!

[LUCIO pours the wine into the fountain. FRANCESCO resumes his strumming.

O whitest flower,
From yon high bower
Look down this hour,——

RUDOLFO [*coming across*]. Cease! or I hack thy strings.

FRANCESCO. Bounteous, but most chaste Moon,
here is a lover

Bids us not look on Heaven!—would blot out stars,
Block windows, call down watchmen from the walls,
Put out the eyes of the astronomers,
And hold thee his alone! O gentle mistress,
Art thou indeed for him, and for none other?
Then wherefor didst thou bend kind looks on me?

RUDOLFO. Enough! See to it: get hence!

FRANCESCO. Nay, thou canst have her.

Only be careful: see thou treat her well!

For, if thy worth diminish, when she wanes

She'll give thee horns. [RUDOLFO *threatens him*.

Nay, nay, not cow's horns, Signor!
But horns of ivory, horns of——

RUDOLFO. This man's mad!

FRANCESCO. Moon-mad, and full of wine, and
wanting more!

Enter UBERTO, RINALDO, PAOLO, and other
Revellers.

REVELLERS. Hi! Hi! Where is Francesco?

FRANCESCO. Hello! Hello! Have ye still legs
to run?—

And wings? Come, birds!

THE REVELLERS

UBERTO. Well, well ! what is it, Francesco ?

RINALDO. Cloth-merchant, are we drunk ?

PAOLO. The old padrone has turned us out :

Says we have had more wine than we have paid for !

FRANCESCO. Charges *you*, does he ?

RINALDO. Cloth-yard, are we drunk ?

FRANCESCO. I have seen worse, Rinaldo. Yonder lies one.

UBERTO. What ? The Podesta ?

FRANCESCO. Aye ! an hour ago,

I found him making a bed of his own doorstep.

Truly—compared with him—ye be all sober.

LUCIO. He lies there still.

RINALDO. Old paunch-pot turned us out,—said we were drunk.

To the cow's horn with him !

UBERTO [*after going to look*]. Aye, lies there still !

Lord ! where are such examples going to lead us ?

PAOLO. To drink. We are all drunk : Assisi's drunk.

Oh, if Perugia knew, now were her time !

FRANCESCO. Count on it, Paolo ! I can give you proof.

The hour has struck ; Assisi is in danger.

PAOLO. Comes when ?

FRANCESCO. This very night.

UBERTO. Whence get you that, dreamer ?

FRANCESCO [*pointing to the fountain*]. Look, Brothers !

There is the omen.

PAOLO. What is it ?

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FRANCESCO. Blood!

[They gather round, much impressed, and peer down into the fountain.]

UBERTO. How comes it?

FRANCESCO. By miracle!

To-night is the fulfilment of a great marvel.
When I was a child, my nurse oft told me of it;
But never have I believed it true—till now.

PAOLO. Believed what true?

FRANCESCO. Ye know whose is this church?
Within these walls, sacred to San Rufino,
Here, under the high altar, lie his bones.
The legend says they live: and that when war
Threatens our city's peace, those bones sweat

blood,
Which, changed to wine, flows down into this
fountain,
Forewarning us of danger.

PAOLO. This is strange telling!

FRANCESCO. Take not my word for it: San
Rufino's vintage
Offers itself for proof.

[He dips the chained cup, and holds it out to them.]

LUCIO, *lending himself to the deception, advances to make reverent inspection, followed by others.*

LUCIO. It looks like wine.

[He hands the cup to UBERTO, who samples it suspiciously.]

UBERTO. Aye, and it tastes like wine.

FRANCESCO. 'Tis wine, Uberto! Drink! I've won my wager!

[So saying, he slaps him over the back with the wine-skin.]

THE REVELLERS

[*This sudden revelation is greeted with a burst of laughter. Sobriety vanishes, bibulous merriment again holds sway.*]

LUCIO. Ha! He hath beaten thee! The tailor's goose Was the better bird, for all thy crowing, Uberto!

UBERTO. Well, I repent not of it! When the padrone Kept his last wine-skin from us, I was angry : Now I forgive him.

FRANCESCO [*holding out the cup*]. So, more wine, Padrone!

Pour night into a cup : I'll drink it dry ! Till dawn shall fill it again.

[*The cup begins to go round. RINALDO, slow of wits, still sticks to his grievance.*]

RINALDO. He turned us out ! Shall a man live,—shall a padrone live,— Shall he have licence to deny his guests The reason—the only reason for his existence ?

PAOLO. Come, come, Rinaldo ! Here's consolation for thee. [*Offers him the cup.*]

RINALDO. Why, this is the very life that he denied me ! [*Drinking*] This, this is what I live for !

FRANCESCO. Happy man ! To drink, and have thy heaven !

RINALDO [*still drinking*]. Ah ! were I a stone, I would go down into this fountain, and so live, Never to come up again. Why should I ?

FRANCESCO. No reason why ; life being without reason.

LUCIO. Life without reason ? Come ! how make you that ?

FRANCESCO. What does man live for ?

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UBERTO. That he may go on living.

FRANCESCO. And when he dies—what then ?

LUCIO. He lives on still.

PAOLO. He can't help living.

FRANCESCO. Having no choice puts reason out of court.

LUCIO. And to this riddle, Francesco, what is thy answer ?

FRANCESCO. Man lives to be in keeping with his nature ;

To be a man, and not to be alive,

Were most unnatural.

Why do I stand on my feet ? Because my feet
Are made to stand on. Why do I see with mine eyes ?
Because they are windows to look through. Why
do I talk ?

Because I have a tongue. Why do I love ?

RINALDO [*mockingly*]. Love !

FRANCESCO. Because, without love, man is nothing. And nobody can give me a better reason.

UBERTO. Call you that reason ? I can reason too.
Why do I stumble ? Because I have feet to
stumble with.

Why do I weep ? Because I have eyes to weep from.
Why does the moon grow full ? Because she plays
the wanton.

Why do I make cuckolds of all married men ?
Because woman is woman.

There 's reason for you ! More wine, Padrone !

FRANCESCO [*holding back the cup*]. Why does he
want more wine that is not thirsty ?

UBERTO. Because, if a thing is good, he wants it
without reason.

THE REVELLERS

FRANCESCO. That's the truth of it, Uberto.

And that is why

Folly is better than wisdom.

Wisdom requires a reason : Folly none.

LUCIO. And what is Folly ?

FRANCESCO. That which is happy, and without reason lives.

PAOLO. But Folly himself does some things for a reason.

FRANCESCO. For a false reason.

PAOLO. When he is tired, Folly goes to bed.

RINALDO. Not he !

UBERTO. Yes ; with a bedfellow.

RINALDO. The more tired he, when he gets up again!

FRANCESCO. And so must sleep in the daytime, when by reason he should be waking. Therefore sleeps not till reason is against it. So without reason sleeps :—which proves my point.

PAOLO. What : that a fool can reason ?

FRANCESCO. Pretending to be wise.

UBERTO. More drink, Padrone !

PAOLO. Fill us with folly, Francesco ! The night is young.

FRANCESCO. Is it your pleasure ?

SEVERAL. Agreed ! you lead : we follow.

[FRANCESCO *strikes his strings, and begins singing. The others join in.*

Come, Folly, sweet Folly, to me be kind !

Make bright the eyes of the hour that flies !

For to wait till the morrow,

That brings a man sorrow,

Is a trade that has never made any man wise !

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

Come, drink, then, drink, and merry let us be !
For who can tell but to-morrow he may die ?

Though never have I met
With any one yet

Can tell a man, tell a man, tell a man why !

[RUDOLFO *comes suddenly across from his hiding-place.*

RUDOLFO. Root out, you noisy rogues ! What means this clamour,

Waking the weary echoes of the night ?

FRANCESCO. The song is over, Signor. The Moon is yours again :

Yonder she waits for you.

[RUDOLFO *makes a gesture.*

PAOLO [*interposing*]. Take it not ill, Rudolfo ! The fool means well, and there 's no mending him.

FRANCESCO. So now to return to our philosophy : We are agreed, are we not, that Folly stands Not upon reason ? But when he goes to war, Must he not have some reason, though 'twere a false one ?

UBERTO. By the cow's horn, I think so !

FRANCESCO. Aye, there you have it. Look you ! On market day,

Into Assisi enters from Perugia

One of her citizens—a man of wealth.

Ere the day ends, he goes with a hole in him,

And through it back to the dust from which he came.

What follows next ? We, in Assisi, say

'Twas a cow's horn that did it. They, in Perugia, Swear that Assisi slew him, by the hand of—

[*He pauses.*

THE REVELLERS

LUCIO [*meaningly*]. No need to name him.

[RUDOLFO *turns sharp and looks at him* : LUCIO *stiffens* ; *they stand eyeing each other.*

FRANCESCO. And that *no* cow did it.

On that they threaten war.

And when we have fought enough, and raged enough,
And piled up waste enough of blood and treasure,
Some day we shall make peace. And we, in Assisi,
Shall still say 'twas a cow that did it ; and they
Will swear that it was murder,—not horn but steel.

Now had it chanced contrary—that in Perugia

One of our citizens had been so slain,

Then would Perugia have pledged her faith

To a cow's horn, and we—to a murdered man.

And this is War,—for which Folly finds reason !

PAOLO [*singing*]. O Folly, sweet Folly !—

RUDOLFO. Well, if the horn was long and sharp
enough

To do its work, would any wish a better ?

LUCIO. One, less of a coward,—that having dealt
the blow

Would take the blame for it, not leaving others

To pay his debt !

RUDOLFO. How now, Lucio ?

FRANCESCO. Come, come ! Will you not drink ?

LUCIO. Let me go, Paolo !

He talks of the cow's horn. So do we all,—

Against Perugia to maintain our quarrel.

But we, here in Assisi, know 'tis false !

And that, in the market-place, was no cow's horn,

Or long, or sharp, or straight, or cruel enough,

To deal that blow !

FRANCESCO. Peace, Lucio ! hold thy tongue !

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

LUCIO. And I tell you, Rudolfo, that you lie !
With your cow's horn, you, from a secret corner,
Did stab him in the back. There ! Now you have
it !

RUDOLFO. Enough, I take you !

LUCIO. Paolo, thy sword !

[*He takes PAOLO'S sword.*

Have out thy horn ! Now toss me if thou canst !

[RUDOLFO *draws. They fight. The window
above is flung open.*

ANTONIA. Ah, God ! Francesco, part them !

[FRANCESCO *intervenes with his mandol, and
endeavours to strike down their weapons.*

FRANCESCO. Softly, softly !

Here is a tune wherein I must take part.

Come, Brothers, come ! What piece is this you play ?
On my head be it !

[*Coming between, he takes a thrust from LUCIO'S
sword, and falls into RUDOLFO'S arms.*

Oh, I have taken death,

Lucio, from thee ! Rudolfo, give me stay !

Bring me some of the blood of San Rufino :

So—ere I die !

[*They bear him to the fountain, and fill the cup
for him. He drinks, and makes as much of his
dying as is possible. LUCIO stands distraught
with grief : even RUDOLFO is compunctious.*

FRANCESCO. Ah ! swear to me, Rudolfo !

And you, Lucio, you too ;—never again !

Your hand. Your hand. [*He takes first LUCIO'S,
then RUDOLFO'S, holding them both.*] Ye
swear ?

LUCIO. I swear, Francesco.

THE REVELLERS

RUDOLFO. I am content. This quarrel was not my seeking.

FRANCESCO. Why, then, all 's well again. Put up your steel!

And pardon me, dear friends, that I deceived you. There came a voice from Heaven,—and I obeyed.

[He rises, showing plainly that he does not intend dying. But his hurt is a real one: blood drips from it. He staggers.]

RINALDO. Francesco, thou 'rt more drunk than any of us.

LUCIO. Oh! I have hurt thee!

[He takes FRANCESCO'S arm, and begins bandaging it.]

FRANCESCO. No, no, Lucio; 'tis nothing.

Rudolfo spares thee: vex him not again.

RUDOLFO. Art thou so bled, Francesco? It was not I

That did it.

FRANCESCO. I would it had been, if this taste of blood

Could satisfy thee, Rudolfo.

RUDOLFO. Get him to bed! I leave you. So, farewell!

FRANCESCO. Aye, fare thee well, Rudolfo, fare thee well!

[Exit RUDOLFO. FRANCESCO sits down, and draws a deep breath. All wait on him.]

'Tis a fair night. Let not brief discord break

The harmony of our mirth. Come, let 's play on,
And to unfinished music give conclusion.

PAOLO. What now, Francesco?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCESCO. Yonder stands Folly, and beckons.

PAOLO. Whither away ?

FRANCESCO. Assisi is asleep. Let us wake her !

UBERTO. How ? Wherewith ?

FRANCESCO. A noise of drums,—the beating of
her own heart !

Thinks she is at peace,—wakes to a sound of war ;
Dreaming of safety, finds her house on fire ;
Fenced within walls, hears that those walls are down !
So starkly wakened—should any doubt our word—
There 's San Rufino's blood to show for it.

PAOLO. 'Tis a large matter, Francesco ! How
can so few
Rouse a whole city ?

FRANCESCO. Ring the bells, Paolo, shout, beat
at the gates,
Bring torches, run, raise knockings in all the streets,
Wake the Podesta, call the city guard,
Shout ' Ho ! Perugia ! ' Make loud enough
The terror of your tongues,—so swiftly then
Shall the infection spread, will any hereafter
Dare say what dog first barked ? We shall be
blameless

Like all the rest. Oh, come, stay not to parley !
To it, boys, to it ! When San Rufino sounds,
Your call has come. Then bid Assisi wake !

*[The Revellers disperse swiftly, this way and that.
Some FRANCESCO holds back.]*

LUCIO. The Podesta is there, Francesco.

FRANCESCO. Go, take two others,
Blind him, and bring him hither ! Now, my Uberto,
Yonder Rufino's bell is waiting for thee.

[He helps UBERTO to enter the church by the

THE REVELLERS

stair window. And now for a moment he is all alone.

O sweet Antonia, do not be afraid !

Our revel harms thee not ; nor shall thy heart

Have further ground for grief. Lucio is safe.

Enter RINALDO and others, leading the PODESTA, bound and bonneted.

[Overhead the bell of San Rufino starts clanging. Uproar begins in the city.]

RINALDO. Thou naughty man, thou naughty man, come hither !

PODESTA. Let me go, villains !

RINALDO. He calls us villains !

PODESTA. Help ! Help !

FRANCESCO. Fellow, who art thou ?

PODESTA. I am the Podesta.

FRANCESCO. That cannot be ; for drunk, and on his doorstep,

We find thee sleeping.

PODESTA. I say I *am* the Podesta !

FRANCESCO. Then, if thou art,

Why wast thou sleeping ?

PODESTA. Wherefor should I not sleep ? May one not sleep o' night ?

[More bells begin ringing.]

FRANCESCO. Hark, to his folly ! Old man, how dar'st thou sleep

With death at every door, and city gates

Unguarded, for the enemy to enter ?

PODESTA. Who is the enemy ?

FRANCESCO. Perugia.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

PODESTA. You lie! She is not. Yesterday,
came word

Proposing peace!

FRANCESCO. A blind!—blinkers for asses!

And thou hast put them on; and in her
harness,

Tied to her yoke, thou hast betrayed the city.

PODESTA. Nay, God forbid!

[The uproar increases.]

FRANCESCO. Thy prayer is said too late!

PODESTA. I'll not believe it. Where is the city
guard?

Guard! Guard! Ho, help! Thieves, robbers,
murderers!

FRANCESCO. Needless thou criest. Loose, and
let him go!

[They unbind him, and at a signal from

FRANCESCO run off. UBERTO returns.]

If thou believe me not, the more drunk thou.

Are not the signs apparent to thy brain?

Hark to the beating bells, the battered gates,

The shoutings in the streets!

Or, if such signs be not sufficient for thee,

Here witnesses the blood of San Rufino.

PODESTA. Saints! What a night is this of signs
and wonders!

How am I torn, divided!

*Enter citizens, running, half-clad and
carrying arms.*

Help, ho! Guard!

Come ye so late when I call you? Are ye so slow,
When doom is on us? Ho! Bring me my sword,

THE REVELLERS

My helm, my armour ! Go, get me a horse !
Cry ' Help, Assisi ! ' Ho ! Assisi ! Ho !

[Exit, accompanied by the citizens.]

UBERTO *[laughing]*. There goes old Thunderbolt !
Thou hast so stuffed his stomach for the fight,
Now there 's no holding him.

FRANCESCO. Hark, how he roars them on !
Assisi wakes,
And sleep is slain for ever.

UBERTO. I must see more of this. Come on,
Francesco ! *[Exit UBERTO.]*

[FRANCESCO sits down by the fountain, in sudden dejection.]

FRANCESCO. Sweet night, how we have fouled
thee ! Into thy fold
Have come like wolves, and all the flocks of peace
Into a howling wilderness have scattered !

[The tumult in the city increases.]

O Father Folly, whither hast thou brought me ?
Here, after faithful service, am I left ;
And when my other father hears tell of it,
To-morrow, there 'll be trouble ! See, up yonder,
How from her throne the chaste and bloodless Moon
Watches our world, so drunk, so full of wine,
And boisterous revelry, and jealous fears,
Dancing to death ! *[A clock tolls.]* There goes
another hour !

Nay, thou didst well, Antonia, not to mate
With such a moon-calf as makes meat on me !

Enter LUCIO, running.

LUCIO. O my Francesco !
Here is great news and marvellous ! Didst thou *know* ?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

Come messengers ! Perugia declares war !
Her army is set forth, and will be here
Ere daybreak ! O Francesco ! Didst thou *know* ?
FRANCESCO [*whimsically amused*]. No, Lucio, I
did not ! But the Moon knew :
For she sees further than we do.
VOICES [*without*]. Francesco ! Francesco !
FRANCESCO. Heaven hath been kind to me, I
have done well ;
And I shall not be hanged for it.
Look, Lucio, look ! What a light shines on me !
I am moonstruck : there she goes to make my
fortune !
I shall be Prince ; the world shall hear of me !
And for Assisi I will make a name,—
For fair Assisi !

Enter UBERTO *and the other* Revellers.

REVELLERS. Francesco, thou hast saved the city !
[FRANCESCO *stands for a moment rapt in the
delight of his success. Then takes his instru-
ment and sings.*

FRANCESCO. O Folly, sweet Folly, to me be kind !
Make bright the eyes of the hour that flies !
For to wait till the morrow,
That brings a man sorrow,
Is a trade that has never made any man wise !
[*With cheers, the Revellers hoist him to their
shoulders and bear him off. His song dies
away in the distance.*

CURTAIN

FELLOW-PRISONERS



Scene: a prison in Perugia. The door with barred grille is set in a recess to the right facing the spectator. To the left, high up in the wall above a stone seat, is a grated window. At one end of a table in the foreground RINALDO and UBERTO are throwing dice; at the other GIOVANNI and PAOLO play chess. RUDOLFO sits apart

from the rest paring his nails with vindictive relish as though he were flaying an enemy. Other prisoners loiter expectantly at the door; some talk through the grille with their gaolers. LUCIO sits under the window sunk in dejection: over his head hangs a wicker cage containing a pair of doves. FRANCESCO reclines beside him and sings to the accompaniment of a guitar. The song is gay and debonair; grace-notes abound in it.

FRANCESCO. Why should we wish for wings to fly,
O Head, O Heart, now you and I
Have found a cell which fits us well?
Life is our own: let well alone!
Birds of a feather, down we fell
Together, to find fortune flown.

[RINALDO turns with a gesture of
impatience.

UBERTO. Come, play, Rinaldo!

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCESCO. Why should I wish for feet to run ?
So many a mile, so ill begun,
I toiled to make myself a jest !
A weary way, a wasted day,
I ran to see a sinking sun——
UBERTO. Again I take thee !

[RINALDO *hands over his stake.*

FRANCESCO. Which set too soon. But now the
moon

Is kind to me ; and that is best !

RINALDO. Thou chattering monkey, cease ! Tie
up thy tongue !

FRANCESCO. I was not singing to thee, Rinaldo—
Signor Rinaldo.

RINALDO. Thou wast singing in my hearing,
Francesco—Signor Francesco !

I would I were stone deaf, or thou stone dumb !

FRANCESCO. The song is ended, Signor.

RINALDO. End thyself with it !

I am sick of the very sound of thee.

UBERTO. Come, come, Rinaldo ! Let the mer-
chant take

Such measure as he is made for. Now, take mine !
There 's sixes for thee !

RINALDO. I cannot stand that fellow ! The more
lame time

Creeps from us like a snail, the more he crows !

UBERTO. Rudolfo, stand in with us presently :
We 'll make a place for thee.

[RUDOLFO *half turns his head but says nothing.*

RINALDO. How savage sick he is !

UBERTO. Like a chained hawk :
Song-birds do better.

FELLOW-PRISONERS

RINALDO. What ? That gold-finch ? Faugh !
I 'd like to throttle him.

UBERTO. Well, hate has a use,
When it gives life a purpose. Come, play on !

[RUDOLFO *seems to think so also. His eyes rest
on LUCIO : he watches him intently.*

GIOVANNI. Check !

PAOLO [*taking the piece*]. Goes thy queen.

FRANCESCO. Lucio, what is thy grief ?

LUCIO. The days, and all the minutes of the
hours !

Will this war never end,—peace never come ?

FRANCESCO. Once thou didst sigh that all days
were too short ;

And now thou sighest because they are too long !

Make more of them !—until, so short they seem,

Thou 'lt have new cause for sighing,—namely the
old cause.

LUCIO. Thou 'rt but a fool, Francesco.

FRANCESCO. So was I born. For to be born is
foolish.

My mother cried because of it.

LUCIO. Why is it foolish to be born ?

FRANCESCO. Before a man was born he wanted
nothing ;

But when he is born he wants everything.

LUCIO. And lives to get it ; and so proves his
fitness.

FRANCESCO. Nay, but he cannot ! Look you ;
I have two eyes,

And cannot see from the back of my own head :

But dearly would I like to ! I have two legs ;

And love them so that lief would I have a hundred.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

But a world's wishing will not make them grow,
Nor give me a body that could find room for them.
Want is my master. I am full of wants ;
And therefore am a fool ; and therefore happy.

LUCIO. Why happy, having wants ?

FRANCESCO. Heaven only knows !

Yet would a hundred legs not make me happy ;
For then I should not want them.

LUCIO. Ah ! thou canst talk !

FRANCESCO. What else is left me ? I look out
through bars :

See a bird fly,—and straightway I want wings.
But had I wings, a prisoner,—I should be
More miserable than ever.

LUCIO. Your want were then
To be *out*, also ?

FRANCESCO. Aye ! And, being out,
What should I want with wings ?

LUCIO. Oh, have thy way !
And have thy wants ! Where is the messenger
That brings my ransom ?

FRANCESCO. Riding the same four feet
That bring me mine.

RINALDO. What ? Shall one sorry beast
Bear up the load of all thy boasted fortune,
Thou purse-proud popinjay ?

UBERTO [*laughing*]. Oh, peace, Rinaldo !

RINALDO. Thou pink-eyed peacock ! Sick, I
heard him boast :

' My father's rich : I'm Bernardone's son,
A man of substance ;—price me as you please !
I'm precious, and can be paid for ! ' Faugh ! the
fool

FELLOW-PRISONERS

Has neither blood, backbone, spirit, nor courage ;—
Only a merchant's purse, and a braggart tongue,
And feathers to his cap—for ladies' eyes
That will not look at him.

GIOVANNI. Leave him, Rinaldo !

RINALDO. Leave him ? Let him leave us ! What
folly brought him ?

Was he a fighter ?

FRANCESCO. No, I liked not fighting.

I brought myself, to be with Lucio.

RINALDO. With Lucio ? I thought ye had more
cause

For jealousy.

RUDOLFO [*sarcastically*]. Cause ? Ha !

LUCIO. Have done, Rinaldo !

That is all mended : we are friends again.

RINALDO. I would ye were not ! Thou 'rt the
better man,

Lucio,—the better born, the better bred ;
And it consorts but poorly with thy credit
To friend with such as he.

LUCIO. Pardon, Rinaldo :

I choose friends as I find them—for myself.

RINALDO. Oh, fairly said ! And so do I choose
—pah !—

Things that I spit on !

[FRANCESCO *starts to his feet.*

LUCIO [*interposing*]. Uberto, stand between
This madman and his rage. No, no, Francesco !

[UBERTO *and LUCIO hold them apart.*

FRANCESCO [*turning away*]. Well . . . Well . . .
God keep your wits, sir ! . . . Life 's to mend.

[*He picks up a garment from the bench, squats*

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

cross-legged on the floor, opens his pouch, gets out his needle and thread, and prepares to mend.

RINALDO. Look on him, look! Thou tattered rag, thou patch!

FRANCESCO. Thou worthy fellow.

RINALDO. Thou lie!

FRANCESCO. Thou rash conclusion.

[FRANCESCO holds up the torn garment, and examines it.

PAOLO. Hark, how he mocks him!

LUCIO. Answer not, Francesco!

RINALDO. Thou bauble! Thou piece of trimming!

FRANCESCO. Thou voice of rage.

RINALDO. Thou scab!

FRANCESCO. Thou scold.

[He starts to cut a patch.

RINALDO. Thou upstart worm! Thou mushroom!

FRANCESCO. Thou mother's son.

RINALDO. Thou slime! Thou filth! Thou syrup! Thou sticky thing!

FRANCESCO. Thou person.

GIOVANNI. Francesco, for God's sake, use harder words!

Thou 'lt break his heart.

RINALDO. Ha! Shall my heart be broken

By such a milkmaid! Pah! Yet will I sting him!

UBERTO. God save us! Give us peace!

[FRANCESCO bites off a length of thread.

RINALDO. Thou bastard boy!

FELLOW-PRISONERS

FRANCESCO. Thou pride of ancestors.

RINALDO. Thou crow !

FRANCESCO. Thou crested eagle.

RINALDO. Thou tailor !

FRANCESCO [*threading his needle*]. To the needle's eye, thou camel !

RINALDO [*squealing with rage*]. Ah !

[*The onlookers take RINALDO'S wrath as men well accustomed to enjoying the humours of it. But when he makes an infuriated dash at FRANCESCO, two of the others again stand between.*]

UBERTO. Nay, nay ! Thou shalt not !

GIOVANNI. Be not so curst, Rinaldo !

LUCIO [*to FRANCESCO*]. Nor thou so calm !

The Gaoler enters, followed by two Turnkeys.

GAOLER. Run in, fellows, and part them !

Remember, sirs, that ye be prisoners.

Only free men are free to fight each other.

RINALDO. Enough ! What's he, that thou tak'st keep for him ?

GAOLER. He stands to ransom like all the rest of you.

RINALDO [*fired anew to his grievance*]. To ransom ?
Ha !

This painted stickleback, whose merchant father
Sells cloth by the false yard,——

[*FRANCESCO is about to retort.*]

LUCIO. Oh, peace, Francesco !

RINALDO. This nice, priceless ninny,
Itching to ape his betters, tricks for battle.
He cannot fight, never hath swung a sword ;—

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

Oh ! but can dress ! To armour add ten suits,
Tassels, and silks, striped hose, a cap with
plumes,
Wears silver spurs ; has servants at his back,—
And he a tailor !

GIOVANNI. Come, Rinaldo, come !
A merchant, not a tailor.

RINALDO. Look at him now !

[FRANCESCO *continues his mending.*

Then—taken prisoner—and held to ransom ;
He makes a boast of it, puts up his price,—
Parades his riches. So five hundred ducats
Are set upon *his* head,—on mine two hundred.
Is it to be believed, to be endured,
That my worth is accounted less than his—
Less than his dirty half ? See how he sits !

GAOLER. All which concerns me not. While under
bonds

Ye must be peaceful. I will have no cow's horns
Among you here. Perugia makes no profit
From dead men's bones.

[*He goes toward the door.*

Fair sirs, if any of you

Wish to be buying, vendors from the market
Are here to serve you.

UBERTO. What have they to sell ?

[*The prisoners begin crowding toward the grille,
through which can be heard the cries of the
salesmen.*

GAOLER. Flesh, fish, and fruit ; bread, wine.
Come, take your turns !

Your turns, your turns, gentlemen ! [*To the
Turnkeys*] Stand in between,

FELLOW-PRISONERS

Handle what passes ! [To the prisoners] See that
ye keep the peace ;

Else ye get nothing !

[He goes out. The prisoners at the grille begin
bargaining with money, clothes, or chain-
links, in exchange for provisions.

UBERTO. Thou hawk, how thou didst peck him
with thy tongue !

RINALDO. There is no blood in him ! Why does
he live ?

These peaceful practisers defeat my senses,
And make me look a fool !

UBERTO. Come, let 's to market !

RINALDO. Thou 'st emptied me, Uberto.

UBERTO. That shall not hinder.

I must not see thee starve for that ill-fortune
Which brings me increase. What wilt thou have,
Rinaldo ?

RINALDO. Wine ! Wine ! And then, more
wine !

This rating of a fool makes a man thirsty !

[They move toward the grille. LUCIO, FRAN-
CESCO having given him money, rises to follow
them.

FRANCESCO. Thou hast forgotten, Lucio, to feed
thy cagelings.

LUCIO. When I forget, thou dost remember for
me.

Feed them, Francesco !

[He gives FRANCESCO a bag of grain.

FRANCESCO. Were they my prisoners I would let
them go.

LUCIO. Why ? They seem happy enough.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCESCO. 'Enough'—'Enough'? Oh, Lucio,
they have wings!

LUCIO. They have not brains, Francesco: but,
what is better,
Each hath its mate.

FRANCESCO. Aye; that is true! . . .
Lucio, we two, in prison, are better friends
Than fortune would allow us when in freedom.

LUCIO. No reason stands against it now, Fran-
cesco.
The fear each had of each hath lost all meaning,—
She being so far away.

FRANCESCO. I never feared,
I only envied thee. . . . But now, I know!

LUCIO [*gently*]. How much I love her?

FRANCESCO. How much she loves thee.

LUCIO [*devoutly*]. I do believe 'tis true! Rudolfo
lied!

She did not love him—ever.

FRANCESCO. Said he so? . . .
No: nor Francesco; only Lucio.

[*He mounts the bench, and begins giving
the birds their food. LUCIO goes to
the grille. GIOVANNI, having made his
purchases, approaches, and stands watch-
ing.*

GIOVANNI. Francesco, dost thou hope to get thy
ransom?

FRANCESCO. Aye: if my father thinks that I am
worth it.

GIOVANNI. 'Tis a great sum. Merchants fare
better now
Than lords of title: while both parties fight

FELLOW-PRISONERS

They make their profits. Hast thou heard, Francesco,
Of what has happened lately, in Assisi ?

FRANCESCO. I heard a whisper of it.

GIOVANNI.

Rinaldo now

Will scarcely raise his ransom. At his back
Stands an impoverished house ; and there be others.

FRANCESCO. Others ?—What, here ?

GIOVANNI.

Rudolfo's loss is more

Than he yet knows ; no one dares tell him of it.

We're of the people's party ; in whose winning

These find their downfall.

FRANCESCO [*after a pause*]. Aye !

GIOVANNI. What does 'aye' stand for ?

FRANCESCO. No one dares tell him ? Oh, had

Rudolfo guessed

That a cow's horn could into so much ruin

Have pushed a city !

[*There is commotion at the gate. LUCIO comes running.*]

LUCIO. Ho ! Ho ! Ho ! Francesco,

Here comes the messenger, bringing my ransom !

To-night I shall be there !

[*The door opens ; POMPILO, full of his importance, enters.*]

SEVERAL. Ah ! 'tis Pompilio ! Worthy Pompilio !

Welcome ! What news ? What news ?

POMPILO. Greeting, fair Signors. I come from

Assisi ;

And I have here—— [*They all crowd in on him.*]

I pray you, give me space

Wherein to find myself. By your leave, gentlemen !

So . . . I have here—I being Commissary, Emis-

sary, or Embassy——

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

RINALDO. Messer Pompilio, hast thou brought my ransom ?

UBERTO. And mine !

OTHERS. And mine !

LUCIO. Oh, where is mine, Pompilio ?

POMPILIO. I have with me a list, Signors. Patience, I pray you !

Here is the list ; with names set in due order.

I cannot give the names except I read them . . .

Signor Giovanni.

GIOVANNI. Aye.

POMPILIO. Thy ransom of a hundred ducats, the citizens have accorded thee by vote : having heard well of thy doings ere thou wast taken.

FRANCESCO. See what comes of being brave, Giovanni ! I was not brave. No vote would see me ransomed.

POMPILIO. Signor Rudolfo, I have brought thy ransom.

RUDOLFO. Surely : I sent for it. Wherefor so late ?

POMPILIO. 'Twas hard to come by, Signor.

[POMPILIO hands him his ransom.]

RUDOLFO. Hard ? Why hard ?

POMPILIO. I have ill news for thee. Signor Rudolfo, Thy house is down : no stone of it is left.

The citizens, needing stone to build their walls,

Thy house has served their purpose : thine, and some others.

[For a moment RUDOLFO stands dazed.]

Signor Paolo.

RUDOLFO. Hell and perdition take them !

[He goes and beats at the grille.]

FELLOW-PRISONERS

A ransom ! Hi ! Here, fellows, let me go !
I will have down their walls before they know !

[*The door opens. Exit RUDOLFO.*]

LUCIO. He goes, Francesco !

FRANCESCO. Carrying lame fortune with him.

LUCIO. But I have less ! His riches find him
favour ;

And now he will be first.

FRANCESCO. What ?—with Antonia ? Oh, have
no fear.

To-night I give thee wings !

POMPILIO. Signor Rinaldo,

Thou 'rt in like case, but worse. Thy father's house,
His goods, his lands, and his estate being forfeit,
There is no ransom for thee . . . Signor Lucio.

RINALDO. Out, Tradesman ! If thou art not gone
to-night,

I 'll throttle thee !

[*Pushing FRANCESCO violently aside, he retires.*]

UBERTO goes to comfort him.

POMPILIO. Signor Lucio . . .

Thy father saith, as thou didst go to war

Contrary to his wish and prohibition,

Thou must come out of it—by thine own means.

LUCIO. Francesco ! I am slain !

FRANCESCO. Patience, awhile !

POMPILIO. Signor Uberto.

UBERTO. Well ? How falls my fortune ?

POMPILIO. Thy ransom was two hundred and fifty
ducats,

And here I have it for thee.

UBERTO. Oh ! Give me a horse with wings !

Now will I fly,

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

Back to Assisi, ere a new day dawn.

Come, Giovanni! Alas, my poor Rinaldo!

RINALDO. Must I keep house with *him*?

POMPILIO. Signor Francesco.

[POMPILIO *is now handling a bigger money-bag than the others.*

UBERTO. I do not think so. Nay; wait, let us hear!

POMPILIO. Thy ransom, Signor, was five hundred ducats.

Thy father sends it thee; and with all haste

Bids thee return to him.

RINALDO. Dog! I could hang him!

GIOVANNI. He escapes thy keeping,—

As thou didst pray, Rinaldo.

FRANCESCO [*taking the bag*]. Is here the full amount?

POMPILIO. Why, surely, Signor.

FRANCESCO [*meditating*]. Five hundred ducats.

RINALDO. To see him handle it doth sicken me!

Out, scabby leper!

POMPILIO. Now for the others. Come, gentlemen!

[*The remaining prisoners gather round POMPILIO and receive their ransoms. The door opens and shuts to their summons. One by one they go out.*

FRANCESCO. Lucio . . . What was thy ransom?

Two hundred, was it not?

LUCIO. 'Twas so, Francesco.

FRANCESCO [*giving it*]. Here it is for thee.

LUCIO. For me? What mean you?

FRANCESCO. Wings, Lucio, wings. See, yonder is Assisi.

[LUCIO *stands speechless.*

FRANCESCO. Signor Rinaldo. Was not, also, thy ransom two hundred ducats?

FELLOW-PRISONERS

[RINALDO starts to speak, but stops : and stares
in angry bewilderment.

It is here, Signor ;

For, having now only three hundred left,

They are no use to me.

RINALDO. What does he mean ? To mock me ?

UBERTO [*with quiet conviction*]. No, Rinaldo.

RINALDO. I understand him not.

UBERTO. Nor I. But take it !

For that he means to let thee have thy freedom,

That I can swear to thee.

LUCIO. Ah, dear Francesco ;

Though never have I yet deserved thy love,

How this shall teach me !

FRANCESCO. Go, put on thy wings !

Put on thy wings, my bird, ere night grow deeper !

RINALDO. Signor Francesco . . . I am sorry !

FRANCESCO. So am I, Signor Rinaldo.

'Tis not because I love thee, that I now

Would pay thy ransom. What thou saidst was true.

I am no fighter : even this poor tongue

Hath no such edge as thine. And, since it seems

Assisi still needs fighters,—in my stead

To her I send thee.

LUCIO. O my Francesco, thither when I am come,

How I will sound thy praises !

FRANCESCO. Not too much, brother :

Or many will not believe thee.

RINALDO.

Signor Francesco,

Forgive what a harsh tongue hath said of thee !

I take all back again. Give me thy hand.

[*They join hands.*

Here 's a brave man—my better !

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCESCO. Indeed no, Signor! I am still a coward,
And very much afraid.

LUCIO. Of what, Francesco?

FRANCESCO. Of what my father will say, when he
beholds

This better bargain. He will not be pleased
With me; nor with you, either!

RINALDO. Oh! have no fear.

We will get speech of him, and he shall hear
Handsomely of thee.

FRANCESCO. No . . . no . . . no, Rinaldo.
Avoid my father as thou wouldst the plague!
For being choleric, crossed in his wishes,
He will forget that he's no gentleman.

RINALDO. That's a hard thrust, Francesco.

FRANCESCO. I did not mean it. I was thinking
only of my father.

Now haste! for it gets dark; and the fair road
Waits for your company.

[UBERTO and RINALDO begin to make prepara-
tions for departure. POMPILIO and the other
prisoners have gone.]

LUCIO. O happy night, and road that bears me
home,
Back to my love!

FRANCESCO. And with the dawn Assisi
Shines in thine eyes, and all her windowed towers
And peering walls that climb, roof above roof,
Up the steep hill. Then the dim darkling streets
Awake, doors open, and the market hums,—
And there's Assisi—dancing! I can see
Assisi dancing. Therefore am I free!
Free, Lucio, free!

FELLOW-PRISONERS

RINALDO. So now—as you will have it—
Here we must leave you. I am sorry. I thank
you!

FRANCESCO. And I am glad, Rinaldo, to have
served you.

Signor Uberto,—wilt thou do this for me?
Commend me, from a distance, to my father,—
Say what thou wilt, and thank him for his bounty:
Tell him my worth was never yet so great
As he this day hath made it. To my mother . . .
Go, see her, Lucio, when he shall be absent:
Bid her not weep for me. And, for the rest,
Give all my greeting!

[UBERTO *and* RINALDO *go out.*

LUCIO. Ah! farewell, Francesco!

FRANCESCO [*embracing him*]. Swift to thy mate,
thou turtle! Tarry no more!

See what a tender heaven of bedded stars
Is watching over thee!

LUCIO. Kiss me, Francesco!

Give me a message to her, and I will bear it,
Whate'er it be. Trust me, for now I go!

FRANCESCO. Tell her how much I love—*thee*,
Lucio . . .

Farewell, Brother!

[LUCIO *goes.* FRANCESCO *is left alone.* *He stands listening awhile to the sounds of departure. Then he goes and opens a square of the barred window.*

FRANCESCO. And you, poor turtle pair, the last
of all!

Night comes apace: but in the night your wings
Shall find a home.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

[*He takes the two birds from their cage, and looses them, first one, then, more slowly, the other.*

So, farewell, little sister! . . .

And farewell, brother! Stretch out thy wings, and go!

Tell her how much I love *thee*, Lucio.

[*For a long time he stands looking out into the gathering darkness. Then he steps down, takes his guitar, and sings. As he sings, the empty prison-wall sends back an echo: and it is thus we hear them.*

FRANCESCO [*with echo as accompaniment*]. Go! I have given you wings to fly! (*Wings to fly!*)

[*He starts at the sound, and crosses the chamber.*

What is that voice of sighing and farewell? (*And farewell!*)

So! We are alone together, we two, you and I. (*You and I.*)

Brother Wall! (*Brother Wall!*) Lovers, here we lie. (*Here we lie.*)

Other loves are flown. (*Flown.*) Here alone we dwell. (*We dwell.*)

Alone! (*Alone!*) Not alone! (*Not alone!*)

You and I! (*You and I!*)

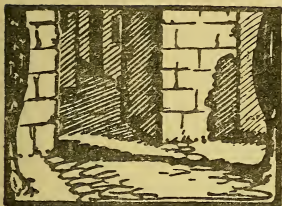
You . . . (*You*) . . . and I! . . . (*and I!*)

[*Ceasing to sing, FRANCESCO stands mazed in his new discovery; then, very softly, he speaks:*

Brother Wall!

CURTAIN

BRIEF LIFE



Outside the walls of Assisi, the rosy light of dawn strikes the battlements and towers: but the gateway still lies in shadow. From within comes the sound of feet on the paved causeway, and a heavy jangling of keys. The gates slowly open, and one sees a narrow tortuous street, the lower windows of which here and there show a light.

As the Porter emerges he stumbles upon an obstacle and stoops to examine it. A Travelling Merchant with his head resting on a large pack is what he sees, and the man being where he ought not to be, the Porter, acting not vindictively but officially, kicks him again.

PORTER. Here—you! Get up!

MERCHANT [*rousing*]. Where am I?

PORTER. In the way. Out of it!

MERCHANT. Is this Assisi?

PORTER. Where else should it be?

MERCHANT. I didn't know. Three years have made a difference. The place has changed. What have you got walls for?

PORTER. Safety, of course. When a city grows rich, it gets to have enemies.

MERCHANT. Oh! When I came last night the gate was shut, so I had to bide out. But I wasn't an enemy.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

PORTER. What have you got there ?

MERCHANT. Same as always : cloth. Rare kinds, too.

PORTER. What are those ?

MERCHANT. Samples. That piece comes from Persia.

PORTER. Where 's Persia ?

MERCHANT. Back of Constantinople.

PORTER. A long way ! All cloth, you say ?

MERCHANT. Aye : the very finest.

PORTER. Pietro Bernardone 's the man for you, then.

MERCHANT. He used to be. Still alive, is he ?

PORTER. More than ever. He 's grown rich.

MERCHANT. Oh ? Did he build this wall ?

PORTER. No. The citizens did that between them ; and quick about it too, for a good reason !

MERCHANT. Why ?

Enter an old Peasant carrying a load of vegetables.

*He walks as though his back pained him,
and whines cheerfully as he goes.*

PEASANT. Ay-ah ! Ay-ah ! Ay-ah !

[He stops to change shoulders.

PORTER. Oh, ho ! Jacopo, you are the first.

PEASANT. Ay-ah ! Ay-ah ! Ay-ah !

[He passes into the city.

MERCHANT. Why had they to be quick ?

PORTER. To keep out the banished lords. They 'd a fight for it.

MERCHANT. Who ?

PORTER. The lords first, on their own ; then Perugia joined in. Now it 's peace again—for a bit.

BRIEF LIFE

MERCHANT. Perugia? I was of half a mind to go there yesterday.

PORTER. You did better to come here.

MERCHANT [*looking back the way he has come*]. Yes? One sees plenty of country anyway. Nothing changed out there.

PORTER. Not? Can you see the Count's castle?

MERCHANT [*changing the direction of his gaze*]. It's gone!

PORTER. Aye. When his back was turned they pulled it down—to build these walls with. [*Chuckling*] He didn't like it!

MERCHANT. Things have happened!

PORTER [*with relish*]. Aye!

MERCHANT. So that's why I had to sleep out. Does Bernardone still live where he used to do?

PORTER. Same street: new house. The largest you can find.

MERCHANT. He had a son, I remember,—a very gay youth; easy at business. Always gave the price that one asked him.

[*As he speaks, a Citizen comes through the gate, and stands awhile before setting forth.*]

PORTER. Signor Francesco?

MERCHANT. Oh, was that his name?

PORTER. Ah! He has been busy dying, for the last—I don't know how long.

MERCHANT. Dying? What ails him?

PORTER. Some sort of fever: gaol fever most likely. He was prisoner in Perugia for over a year. I haven't heard that he's dead.

CITIZEN. Nay, and you will not. To-day Signor Francesco is up and out again.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

PORTER. So ? He 'd always a lot of life in him. Out, you say ?

CITIZEN. As I came forth I passed him—looking more like a wax taper than a man. How come you, Traveller, to Assisi so early ?

MERCHANT. Because last night your city shut its mouth at me. Oh well ! if walls stand for wealth, I 'll not complain of them.

CITIZEN. You come at a good time. This is our market day.

MERCHANT. Market ? One can't sell Persian cloth in a market-place, except it were in the days of Solomon. You aren't all so rich as that yet.

[He goes into the city. A Townsman comes out, and begins setting up his booth in a corner by the gate. While he does so, peasants enter, carrying wine-skins, oil, fruit, vegetables, etc. With some of these he presently barter an exchange.]

PORTER. So ! Signor Francesco lives, does he ?

CITIZEN. Aye : if it be not his ghost. As I passed he seemed not to know me.

PORTER. You are off early, good Signor.

CITIZEN. To be in Spoleto before nightfall.

PORTER. Easy enough now the days grow longer.

CITIZEN. The vines are beginning to look green.

PORTER. Things were late, but they 're coming on now.

CITIZEN. Late is what I must not be. So, friend, God keep you ! *[He goes.]*

PORTER. And may you, Signor, return safely.

[Crossing to the other side of the gate from the now erected booth, he takes out some bread and olives, and begins eating. Inside the gate]

BRIEF LIFE

appears the figure of FRANCESCO. A church-bell tolls a single stroke. He halts ; the sound seems to shake him.

PORTER. Somebody dead. Who 'll that be ? . . .

Now I—I can remember—I can remember when——

[His reminiscence is interrupted by the entry of FRANCESCO who totters through the gate leaning upon two sticks. He is very pale and thin, but his eyes are bright and eager. The prospect ahead absorbs him to the exclusion of all else. He halts and looks over the country lying before him.

PORTER. Signor Francesco ! Is this you — or some other ?

FRANCESCO *[breathing deeply]*. Ah ! . . . Ah ! . . .

Oh, there 's the world again ! Beautiful world !

PORTER. Signor Francesco ! So it 's true : you are alive again.

[Inside the gate two townsmen are seen pitching their booths to right and left of the entrance.

FRANCESCO *[still in a dream]*. Am I ?

[He turns feebly to a seat under the wall, and from there once more fixes his eyes on the prospect before him.

PORTER. Well, well, well ! I don't like the look of that. It 's not Signor Francesco as we knew him.

TOWNSMAN. No.

Enter two Peasant Women, laden for the market, quarrelling as they come.

1ST WOMAN. And I say 'twas mine ! Here, give it me ! *[She makes a snatch.*

2ND WOMAN. 'Twasn't yours : and won't never be yours !

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

1ST WOMAN. He promised he 'd give it me.

2ND WOMAN. He thought better, then. He 's had enough of you. That 's why !

1ST WOMAN. You fat cheat ! I 'll scrape the dirty flesh off you !

2ND WOMAN. You touch me !

[*She throws down her load. Enter a Peasant.*

PEASANT. Here ! Get on ! Get on ! You two she-asses, what are you braying for ?

[*He strikes at them with his staff, and drives them before him. They enter, disputing volubly.*

In with you ! In ! In !

[*Drover and driven disappear through the gate. Others pass in and out. To all these FRANCESCO pays no attention. Out of the city LUCIO comes running : looking anxiously ahead, he misses sight of FRANCESCO.*

LUCIO. Francesco ! [*He continues to run.*] Francesco !

PORTER [*calling him back*]. He 's here.

LUCIO [*turning, surprised*]. Francesco ! I called thee.

FRANCESCO. Aye ?

LUCIO. What is the matter ?

FRANCESCO. Look !

LUCIO. Well ? I *am* looking.

FRANCESCO. What dost thou see, Lucio ?

LUCIO [*at a loss for his meaning*]. Hills . . . trees . . . valleys . . . vineyards . . . the river . . . the road going down. There, south, lies Foligno, there, west, Perugia. . . All the world, Francesco !

BRIEF LIFE

FRANCESCO [*despondently*]. Aye.

LUCIO. And green grass . . . [FRANCESCO *sighs deeply*] and sunshine. Anything else ? . . . What wouldst thou have me see ?

[*The Porter goes in through the gate. The Townsman sits down behind his booth. No one comes by.*]

FRANCESCO. Everything is dying.

LUCIO. Dying ? Nay, it is spring, not autumn I see here.

FRANCESCO. I only see—Death.

LUCIO. But thou art alive again.

FRANCESCO. For a while, for a little while.

LUCIO. Thou art still weak : but soon thou shalt get strong.

FRANCESCO. No.

LUCIO. Yes ; I promise thee !

FRANCESCO. How can a man be strong that is afraid ?

LUCIO. Of what ?

FRANCESCO. Death.

LUCIO [*extenuatingly*]. Death,—death ! To be sure, man is mortal. How else would he be here ?

FRANCESCO [*with a startled cry*]. From thee also I hear it !

LUCIO. What ?

FRANCESCO. The tolling of the bell. . . . Some day . . . some day . . . I must die !

LUCIO. Is that news to thee ?

FRANCESCO. I thought not of it. Now I think—I see death everywhere.

LUCIO. Come, come, Francesco ! Get to bed

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

again ! Thou hast neither wits nor feet to carry thee. Prithee go in with me !

[*Paying no heed to him* FRANCESCO *totter to his feet.*

FRANCESCO. Surely the world is beautiful. But I am blind. I cannot see !

LUCIO. Not see ?

FRANCESCO. Life ! . . . Lucio, Death is waiting for me !

LUCIO [*soothingly*]. Not yet, not yet.

FRANCESCO. Waiting ! . . . and I do fear it !

LUCIO. Francesco, thou art changed !

FRANCESCO. And yet thou knowest me, and wast once my friend !

LUCIO. And shall be ever ! To thee do I not owe That liberty which gave my love its life ?

FRANCESCO. Make haste and have thy fill of it, ere thou die !

LUCIO. Sweet life !

FRANCESCO. Sweet dream !

LUCIO. Why, then, how sweet to dream !

FRANCESCO. Until we waken ! Lucio, haste thee to wed

Ere breaks thy dream ! . . . Look !

LUCIO. What ?

FRANCESCO. On yonder bough
Lighted a bird : and straight a leaf fell down !

LUCIO. Come, come, Francesco !
Show me again the face of ancient friendship !
What has become of thee ? Canst thou not laugh ?
Give me again thy hand ; also thy love,
Which is so dear to me,—for now I need thee !

FRANCESCO. God o' mercy ! That would help !
Why dost thou need me ?

BRIEF LIFE

LUCIO. For that same cause which, parting first,
then bound

My heart with thine. Help to keep safe Antonia!
Yesterday we were betrothed, we two—she and I.

FRANCESCO. Oh, what a cooing of turtles is in
that word!

‘We two; we two; she and I!’

But—if it be so—

What need for further help? Thy suit, thus granted,
Declares her safely thine.

LUCIO. No, no, Francesco!

There is much danger in it—more now than ever!

Rudolfo yields not to the plain persuasion

Of her fixed heart’s preferment,—hears not reason,

Dismissal owns not, will not his claim surrender;

Not her will nor her father’s can dissuade him

From his stiff purpose. Darkly he doth pursue it.

And where doors have but bolts, windows but bars,

On some blind, fearful night he’ll find occasion

To rob me of my heaven! Oh! Francesco!

Why have men hate for those that would hate none?

For this compassionate love which now I cherish

Hath so o’erflown my spirit that henceforward

I would love all men! But—Rudolfo hates me;

And I do fear him.

FRANCESCO. Wherefor shouldst thou fear him,

Being so much the surer? Shall he prove

Less mortal than thou art?

LUCIO. What hast thou said, Francesco?

FRANCESCO. Nothing, nothing, dear fool! Would

kill him

Better thy love,—make thee more worthy of her?

LUCIO. I never thought nor wished it!

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCESCO. Shall man's best virtue—
Which is to love—become a rank offence
When it is found in others ? In that he loves her,
He is the better proved, the more thine equal.
Oh, fear him not ! for then is thy love mortal,
Through fear, as his through hate, which now lives
only
Because thou fear'st him.

LUCIO. Would that I could believe so !
Nay ! for his enmity he hath much reason,
Seeing that, at first, his suit was the more favoured.

FRANCESCO. Never by her.

LUCIO. When did that weigh, Francesco ?
A maiden's favour !—which we, poor fools and
lovers,

Waiting to win, how often we lose all !
The favour was her father's ; so it became
Rudolfo's, he being then so much the richer ;
Till, in the people's rising, his estate
Went racked to ruin. Then, to his misfortune,
That vantage he once counted on, stood mine.

FRANCESCO. And he and I companions in
affliction !

LUCIO. Contraries, rather : for he does not take it
Simply, as thou dost.

FRANCESCO. 'Twould need some wit to teach him
To be as simple as I am.

LUCIO. There is one man
Can teach him ! Thou art full of a strange madness,
Which, though I understand not how, Francesco,
Makes men be other than they are by nature :
Thyself the proof. Therefore, by dear example,
Do thou confirm him to a more kind forbearance,—

BRIEF LIFE

Or to such measure thereof, that he, henceforward,
Shall hate me less. Do this for me, Francesco !

FRANCESCO. Say no more, Lucio! While yet I live
Still would I serve thee.

[RUDOLFO *appears within the gate.*

LUCIO. Comes my enemy !

[*As RUDOLFO comes out, FRANCESCO advances to meet him. LUCIO stands back.*

FRANCESCO. Signor Rudolfo.

RUDOLFO. Your pleasure, Signor ?

FRANCESCO. I pray you give me greeting, and
wish me life !

RUDOLFO. Oh, have thy life ! I grudge it not to
any

Who take not that which is mine.

FRANCESCO.

Bestow on me

Only such parts of thee as go a-begging

When thou hast satisfied the claim of others.

So help me life, I will be merry again !

RUDOLFO. That is well said.

FRANCESCO. I mean—when I am stronger.

RUDOLFO. Then shall I hope to see thee !

Farewell, Signor. Let me, at our next meeting,

Find thee in better case,—and better company.

[*He goes out.*

LUCIO. He never spoke to me ; but all the
while

His eye was on me ! Some fixed and subtle purpose

Hath in his heart found lodgment ; and his mind

Is bent on evil.

I am no coward, Francesco ; yet I fear him !

FRANCESCO. Leave him to me ; and henceforth,
as I live,

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

Thy fear shall find no cause. Come, Lucio !
I will be merry again. I will forget——

[Again the bell begins to toll. FRANCESCO stops short.]

Oh, horrid sound ! How hollow and without hope,
Bereft of harmony, that message comes
Of some brief life now ended. Yet would that bell
Sound merry among the rest ; only alone
Its cry goes mournful !

[The bell tolls more insistently. FRANCESCO stops and struggles with his fear. Suddenly he breaks into a wild cry.]

FRANCESCO. Life ! Life ! Let me have life !

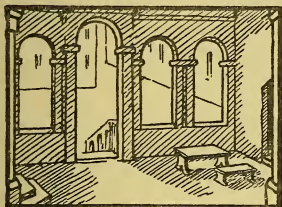
[Letting fall the two sticks he leans on, he throws out his hands, in a gesture of welcome. He totters forward : his knees give under him. He falls into LUCIO'S arms.]

Thou seest, I have feet and can run ! Time
cannot fly so fast as I can. Therefore I will be
merry again ! Merry, merry, Lucio !

[He breaks into wild laughter. The bell tolls on. Out of the gate comes the funeral procession of a young child. The body lies on an open bier borne on the shoulders of children. The mourners follow. The laughter of FRANCESCO stops dead.]

CURTAIN

BLIND EYES



The scene is laid within the loggia of the market-square of Assisi, through which a way of steps leads up into the church. The loggia is raised above the square, which, in bright sunlight and filled with booths, is seen through the arcade. A low balustrade joining pillar to pillar is broken under the second arch from the left by entrance

steps, below which, on a lower level, are seen groups of Beggars. To the left side of the entrance stands a Blind Beggar in rags; a shade covers his eyes, in his right hand he carries a copper bowl for alms: his left arm projecting at an awkward angle is tremulous with paralysis. Between the third and fourth arch stands a table with benches, and further to the right is seen the door of a wine-shop opening into the loggia. The church entrance lies to the extreme left. Throughout the action Townsfolk are seen entering or returning from Mass; as they pass, the Beggars greet them with cries of supplication: 'Charity, kind Charity!' 'Pity the poor!' 'Help the poor cripple!' 'Pity, kind friend!' accompanied now and again by short tags of Latin and the names of saints.

[RINALDO, UBERTO, and LUCIO come up the steps from the square. UBERTO tosses and catches his cap as he goes. RINALDO and he are both laughing. LUCIO, smiling a little slyly, keeps to the rear of the others.

BLIND BEGGAR. Pity the poor blind!

[RINALDO tosses a coin into his bowl. LUCIO,

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

following, looks at the Beggar with suppressed laughter, gives him a secret dig in the ribs and passes. The Beggar, ignoring the intimacy, continues his cry :

Pity the poor blind !

RINALDO. Ho, Padrone !

[The PADRONE scuttles forward obsequiously.

PADRONE. Signor ?

RINALDO. Wine, Padrone ;—your best.

PADRONE. To be sure, Signor, yes. . . . For how many, Signor ?

UBERTO *[ostentatiously counting]*. One . . . two . . . three . . . and another is coming.

PADRONE *[in a tone of discovery]*. Ah ! four, Signor ?

UBERTO. Four . . . precisely.

[The PADRONE hurries away.

Lucio, where is that son of Bernardone ?

LUCIO. Thou 'lt find him here, all in good time, Uberto.

UBERTO. Let him make haste ! Already 'tis near noon.

BLIND BEGGAR. Pity the poor blind !

Enter PAOLO, who gives to the Blind Beggar in passing.

UBERTO. Paolo, hast seen Francesco ?

PAOLO. Down at the Porta Spoleto two hours ago I saw him : giving money to a beggar,—
And very merry about it.

RINALDO *[slapping his knee]*. To a beggar ?
Ha ! Now we 've tracked him.

LUCIO. To what end, Rinaldo ?

BLIND EYES

BLIND BEGGAR. Pity the poor blind !

RINALDO. My fortune, and his ruin. His trick betrays him :

He bribes a beggar, and I—win my wager.

PAOLO. What is the wager ?

UBERTO. Madness, noon-day madness !

RINALDO. Why ! thirty ducats.

LUCIO. Which thou must pay Francesco.

RINALDO. I ?—I pay *him* ? Catch me ! I will be hanged first.

LUCIO. The rope is ready.

PAOLO. Come, come, what wins the wager ?

UBERTO. Francesco says that lying is more easy To be believed than truth.

RINALDO. And honesty

Less profitable than theft. And this he wagers

That he will prove, here in the market-place,—

UBERTO. To-day.

RINALDO. Will tell the same lie fifty times :

UBERTO. Have it believed by all :

RINALDO. Make money by it :

UBERTO. And never have it questioned.

BLIND BEGGAR. Pity the blind !

PAOLO. When does he do it ? Has there been set a time ?

LUCIO. To-day, ere noon.

PAOLO. Will he bring in his pocket

The fools that shall believe him ?

RINALDO. Why ! 'tis we

Ourselves that are to believe him !

PAOLO. A stiff task !

UBERTO. Oh, he's an excellent fool ! But this shall cost him.

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LUCIO. Not a penny, Uberto.

PAOLO. What? Wilt thou also lay
A wager on it?

LUCIO. As I am a sportsman
I wager nothing on that which I'm so sure of.

PAOLO. Well! if he wins, the man's a miracle.

LUCIO. Wait, then; see him perform it.

Enter GIOVANNI. He gives to the Beggar in passing.

RINALDO. Come, Giovanni,
Here's entertainment for thee. . . . Ho, Padrone!

GIOVANNI. What is it?

RINALDO [*to the PADRONE*]. Another cup, more
wine, Padrone.

PAOLO. Francesco—at his tricks again.

GIOVANNI. What now?

UBERTO. He is to tell us lies; and we, being
warned,

Are to believe him.

RINALDO. Nay, and that's not all.
On stroke of noon he swears to take and strip
A cheating beggar.

UBERTO. Beat him round the market,
Rob him of all his money, give it to others,—

RINALDO. And the beggar is to forgive him! . . .
As to that,

His measure has been taken: he has bribed one.

LUCIO. So there you lose, Rinaldo.

RINALDO. I' faith, I do not! I have got him
beaten.

Had he bribed each jack man of them, I care not.
He sets his trap: see me unbait it for him!

BLIND BEGGAR. Pity the poor blind!

BLIND EYES

[RINALDO *signals to the Beggars seated on the steps below.*

RINALDO. Here—here, you fellows! Aye, 'tis you I 'm calling ;
You cripples, you blind bats, lame dogs, deaf mutes,
Come, all of you !

BEGGARS. Pity ! Pity ! Charity ! Kind charity !
[*They begin doubtfully to crowd toward him, still at a distance.*

RINALDO. Oh ! you 'll get charity,—in such good measure

As you deserve. Mark, while I tell a tale !
Know you Francesco, son of Bernardone ?—
Know you him, when you see him ?

BEGGARS. Aye, aye, Signor !

BLIND BEGGAR. I know him well, Signor.

RINALDO.

Hither at noon

He comes to jape, and jest, and mock at you.

BEGGARS. Mock us ? Mock *us* ? How can he mock us, Signor ?

RINALDO. Against two of us he hath laid a wager
He will take one of you, for a cheating beggar,—
First strip, then rob, then beat him round the market.

BEGGARS. Take ? Strip ? Rob ? Beat ?

RINALDO. What say ye ? Shall he do it ?

BEGGARS. No, Signor, no !

PAOLO. Lucio, Rinaldo 's winning !

[LUCIO *shakes his head, smiling.*

RINALDO. Aye ! but there 's one whom he hath bribed to let him.

BEGGARS. No, no ; he shall not !

RINALDO. Then let that man stand out :

And I will give him—hark you !—twice the money,

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

Twice what Francesco offered.—Do you hear me ?—
Twice—that he shall not let himself be beaten !

LUCIO. Oh, excellent, Rinaldo ; excellent !

RINALDO. Now let the fellow he hath bribed come
forward !

BLIND BEGGAR. He bribed *me*, Signor.

RINALDO. You ?—a blind man of all people ?

BLIND BEGGAR. I am not really blind, Signor ; I
can run as fast as he can. When he beats me, I
shall but run away.

UBERTO. Why, here 's as big a rogue as he is
himself !

How much did he promise thee ?

BLIND BEGGAR. All that he got, Signor.

UBERTO. All . . . that . . . he . . . got !

RINALDO. ' Got '—how ?

BLIND BEGGAR. By his wager, Signor.

RINALDO. Thou must be dreaming. That was
thirty ducats.

BLIND BEGGAR. And twice makes sixty, Signor.
I am well content

Not to get beat at all,—for sixty ducats.

[RINALDO *stands stupent : slowly the truth
begins to dawn on him.*

LUCIO. Rinaldo, thou art caught ! This trap was
baited

Too finely for thee.

BLIND BEGGAR [*returning to his post*]. Pity the
poor blind !

[*Up the steps from the square comes CLARA DA
SCIFFI, a child of ten, very richly dressed,
accompanied by her Nurse.*

NURSE [*pushing her way through the Beggars*].

BLIND EYES

Come! what a crowd is this! Make way! Make way!

CLARA. Wait, Nurse, oh, wait! Look! There's a poor blind man.

BLIND BEGGAR. Kind friends, pity, pity the poor——

[CLARA stops and looks up at the Blind Beggar with a face of pity. The Beggar's cry stops abruptly; his arm ceases to jerk; he stoops towards her.

RINALDO [*his mind catching at straws*]. He said—that he would give him—thirty ducats! And—for his lie . . . [*Conviction seizes him.*] Out, cheat!

[CLARA reaches up and puts a coin into the Blind Beggar's bowl. She passes on into the church. The Blind Beggar throws up his hands and falls to weeping.

RINALDO. O cunning knave, I know thee! 'Twas thyself

Thou didst so bribe! There, there! Look at him! Look!

FRANCESCO. Ah! pity me, sweet Jesu, pity me! Oh! what have I done?

PAOLO. Now say! Is that Francesco?

FRANCESCO. Aye, 'tis Francesco. Shame on thee! oh, shame!

Thief, liar, trickster, cheat of charity!

Now will I punish him as he deserves.

Unmask! Do off thy cloak! Strip, and make bare!

Out! Out! Have at thee! So!

[*He throws off his disguise, takes from his girdle a scourge of cords, and descends into the market-place, beating himself as he goes. The crowd* ..

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*follows him with murmurs of astonishment.
The bell tolls the hour of noon.*

GIOVANNI. Is this for the wager ?

PAOLO. Nay, 'tis madness ! See,

See where he goes !

RINALDO. The man is flaying himself !

LUCIO. Francesco !

GIOVANNI. Look ! He tears off his coat !

PAOLO. Look ! He draws blood !

LUCIO. Pity, pity ! Francesco, spare thyself !

RINALDO. Nay ; look you ! look you ! Ah, ha !

GIOVANNI. He falls !

UBERTO. He rises !

LUCIO. Oh, stay ! Enough ! Enough !

RINALDO. Thy fears be folly !

'Tis but another lie ; he mocks us still ;

Under his shirt is a wine-skin.

UBERTO. 'Tis blood, Rinaldo !

RINALDO. I say 'tis wine. He beats, but does
not feel it !

Thou priceless rogue ! All this for sixty ducats !

PAOLO. Hush ! Here he comes again. Way
there, you fellows !

*[The Beggars part to right and left. FRAN-
CESCO re-enters, torn and bloody. Scourge in
hand, he advances pale and trembling.]*

SEVERAL. Well played ! Well played ! Oh,
bravo ! Bravely done !

RINALDO. You 've beaten us, Francesco.

UBERTO. We do own it ;

And stand your debtors.

RINALDO. Give me as happy a death !

I would die laughing !

BLIND EYES

FRANCESCO. Why do you laugh, when you have lost your wager ?

UBERTO. The joke, so played, was worth it !

FRANCESCO. You laugh, Brothers,

Because you like to be lied to. So content you.

The laugh is over !

RINALDO. Not till we 've paid thee. Here is all I have :

The rest must follow.

[RINALDO and UBERTO offer him their purses.

FRANCESCO. I am ashamed !

[*He drops the scourge, and stands weeping.*

LUCIO. Ah, me ! I feared so !

FRANCESCO. Hear me ! I will stand naked.

What I did,

I did in blindness. That I won pittance by lies,
From you, and you, and you,—all that was
nothing :

For in your hearts ye had no charity.

Your giving to the beggar did but help you

The easier to forget him. Came another,—

A little child : her eyes had sorrow in them,

And in her heart was pity. Then I knew

What I had done . . . the blind man's eyes were
opened !

LUCIO [*gently touching him*]. Oh, come away,
Francesco !

FRANCESCO [*drawing away from him*]. Then you
saw, Brothers . . . you saw what I did.

Oh, when I said that I would beat a beggar,—

A cheating beggar,—round the market-place,

Knew I how much he would deserve his beating ?

Well . . . that is done.

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RINALDO. Come! take your winnings, and don't whine, Francesco!

FRANCESCO. My winnings? . . . Ah! Yes, yes: give me your money, And keep back nothing!

UBERTO [*giving him the purses*]. 'Tis all thine, Francesco; and the rest follows.

FRANCESCO. Mine!

[*He moves slowly toward the crowd of Beggars, watching from below.*]

RINALDO. What madness now?

FRANCESCO. Oh, hearken, hearken to me, hungry Brothers!

All you poor, little, holy ones, whose needs I set at naught, whose outstretched hands I mocked: Come, let me kneel to you, and kiss your feet! And take from me this load: this, Brothers, and this, And this! Take all!

[*He distributes the money among them. The Beggars murmur and chuckle confusedly as they scramble for the coins he throws them.*]

Now, of your pity, and charity, pray for me That am a sinner!

RINALDO. Faugh! The fellow's mad!

UBERTO. I think thou art, Francesco.

FRANCESCO. Aye, 'tis true!

For when I was at liberty to do well, Then I did ill! Come then, my friends, put bonds And chains on one that ought not to be free!

RINALDO. Here is a sickness that is past my curing: I understand it not!

UBERTO. I' faith, nor I!

LUCIO. I think I do begin to. Now for the mending!

BLIND EYES

Re-enter, from the church, CLARA accompanied by her Nurse. FRANCESCO goes and kneels before her. He catches the hem of her robe.

FRANCESCO. O little child, sweet lover of my Saviour,
Forgive me that I robbed thee ! I am sorry.

NURSE. Have mercy on us ! What mockery is this ?

Sirrah, be pleased to let my mistress pass !
Nay, who, in God's name, are you ?

FRANCESCO. I am the beggar that got sweet alms from thee,
Pretending to be blind. Oh, was not that
A sorry deed,—to steal kind charity
In jest ?

CLARA. Nurse, the poor gentleman is crying !

NURSE. And well he may ; and should have something to cry for,
Had I the shaping of him ! Out of the way,
Fellow, and let us pass ! Come, come ! Let be !
[Thrusting him aside she moves on.]

CLARA. I'm sorry.

[She stoops forward and kisses him.]

NURSE *[looking back]*. Heart of my heart's mistress, what street-kissing is this ? Off from it, off from it ! For shame ! Here 's a fine tale that shall be told of thee ! What shall thy father say ?

[And so, scolding as she goes, she disappears with her charge. CLARA turns to look back.]

FRANCESCO *in a gentle rapture gazes after her.*

FRANCESCO. She has forgiven me !
Saw you that, Brothers ? Did you understand ?
Know you not what she was ? Oh, look, look, look !

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PAOLO. What mean'st thou ?

FRANCESCO. That—was Sister Charity !

RINALDO. Come, let us go, and to his madness
leave him !

UBERTO. Farewell, Francesco ! Heaven bring
thy wits

To a better understanding !

FRANCESCO. Aye ! . . . Amen !

[*Exeunt* UBERTO, RINALDO, and PAOLO.

GIOVANNI. Deal wisely with him, Lucio !

LUCIO. He will do

That for himself, Giovanni. Fare thee well !

[*Exit* GIOVANNI.

[LUCIO *stands watching* FRANCESCO *without speaking. For a while* FRANCESCO *stands quite still, lost to the world. Then very gently he begins speaking.*

FRANCESCO. Look, in what verity,

When she begins,

One kiss of Charity

Covers my sins.

What shall I say to her

That was so kind ?

This is my way to her—

' Pity the blind ! '

Put off disparity

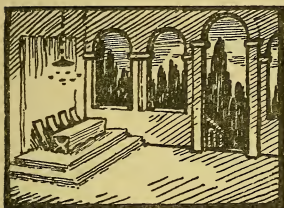
And all disguise :

Sweet Sister Charity,

Open mine eyes !

CURTAIN

THE BRIDE FEAST



Scene : A broad arched loggia opening upon a garden. To one side, on a low dais, is a table, set with fruit and flowers, at which the bridal party is seated. Night has fallen ; candles are lighted ; and across all but the central archway curtains have been drawn. Attendants pass in and out, removing the remains of the feast. A

Servant bears round a bowl of rose-water into which the guests dip their hands ; another follows with a napkin. The Two Lovers dip and dry hands together. Absorbed in each other they pay no heed to what goes on round them.

BALDONE. Our feast is over, but not our contentment ;

Which, from such full assurance as here offers,
Waits for more courses in the abundant future.

ARNOLFO. Aye, surely ; if these young vows now
in the making

Bear fruit after their kind !

LUCREZIA.

May one but live to see it !

BALDONE.

That may we all, Lucrezia.

UBERTO.

Fruit should come quick ; and make you, Messer

Baldone,

Young in your ancestry.

Signor Arnolfo,

Wherefor doubt ?

From such blossom

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

BALDONE. It should do. Oh, were health the effect of favour,
And youth as catching as it appears attractive
To her eyes now, I'd be a boy again!

LUCREZIA [*watching the lovers*]. So lost to the world already!

ARNOLFO. Their love so wraps them
They are abed each in the other's eyes.

BALDONE. The time's still early: they withdraw too soon

From our society.

LUCREZIA. But out of such a dream who shall dare wake them?

BALDONE. I will. Antonia!

[*The call goes unheeded.*]

ARNOLFO. You: Lucio!

UBERTO. Thy father calls thee, Lucio.

LUCIO. Sir?

ARNOLFO. Return to us awhile! Are ye departed Ere ye have said good-night?

LUCIO. 'Tis a good-night, sir, though it be not said:

It needs not saying.

BALDONE. Truly, I think not either!

Love is a wondrous wine: it goes down sweetly,
Causing the lips of them that dream to speak.

Server, draw back the curtains, and let cool night
Breathe on us with all her spices!

[*The curtains are drawn back, disclosing a garden of deep dusk in which moonlight is faintly beginning. All the Attendants but one have now gone.*]

LUCREZIA. Hark, a bird sings.

THE BRIDE FEAST

ARNOLFO. Then Lucio must sing louder.
Thou hast a rival, boy. Take up thy lute !

[*A figure in cloak and hood, wearing a mask, crosses the garden and halts behind one of the pillars. There he stands, looking fixedly at*

ANTONIA.

LUCIO. Aye ; if Antonia will first prove the strings. [*He offers her his lute.*

ANTONIA [*striking a chord*]. There are the keys for thee.

LUCIO. The song is sung. I cannot better it.
[*He lays the lute down again.*

BALDONE. His plight stays hopeless !
Here is to thy recovery, Lucio. [*Drinks.*
And thine, Antonia,—if thou share his sickness.

ANTONIA. Indeed I do : nor ever of mine own will

Wish to be cured !

BALDONE. Well, well, since you deny us,
We must have other minstrels. What is this masque
That they are bringing us ?

LUCIO. It is Francesco's.

BALDONE. Francesco Bernardone's ? He is thy friend ?

I have heard tell of thy much love for him.

LUCIO. And there 's more of it. Till I beheld thy daughter,

He was half the world to me.

ARNOLFO. 'Twas a rare friendship, seeing he was thy rival.

LUCIO. 'Twas a rare man, Father. He hath a heart

So foolish and so tender, that whoso wins it

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Finds himself beaten. Is it not to him
I owe the peace which gives present completion
To my fair fortune ?

BALDONE. Aye ? what peace mean you ?

LUCIO. Sir, he hath wrought Rudolfo
(Whom once you did prefer, and to his suit extend
some favour)

Out of his jealous anger unto acceptance
Of that which finds us here. So, to-night, brings
Rudolfo with him, a partner in his pageant,
For token of fair amity and peace,
Contention being ended.

BALDONE. He deserves well, that over his own
heart

Thrones and makes prosperous the loves of others.

ANTONIA [*rising*]. Oh ! See there ! See there !

BALDONE. What now, Antonia ?

ANTONIA [*pointing*]. There ! . . . Methought I saw
Death, looking at me !

LUCREZIA. How—looking ?

BALDONE [*to Attendant*]. Go ; see what it is !

ANTONIA. Yonder he stood—without.

ATTENDANT. Nothing is there, Lady.

BALDONE. Come, these are maiden fears ! Even
as do children

Upon their way to bed behold hobgoblins—
Yet dream not of them, once they are asleep.
Therefore fear nothing. Lucio holds thee safe.

LUCIO [*drawing ANTONIA apart*]. What was it,
Antonia ? Hast thou fear of me ?

ANTONIA. No, no, no !

LUCIO. Look, what a moon is on us ! Up in heaven
Our lamp is lighted. Thither will we climb.

THE BRIDE FEAST

BALDONE. Hark ! Here comes music. What ?
Is the masque beginning ?

[*In the garden appear Minstrels. Enter a golden CUPID, crowned with roses, and bearing a red bow and red arrows.*]

CUPID. Gallants, lords, and ladies gay,
Hither I am sent to say :

‘ Make you ready for our play ! ’

UBERTO. A pretty wench ! Who art thou ?

CUPID. I am not a wench, sir, but a boy ; and to
tell thee who I am, comes later.

BALDONE. Get on with thy part, then, and have
done with it !

CUPID. I will begin it again ; for your speech
hath put me out. I pray you, do not stop me !

Gallants, lords, and ladies gay,

Hither I am sent to say :

‘ Make you ready for our play ! ’

UBERTO. This is no boy : it is a parrot !

CUPID. Me, as Cupid, ye shall know.

Every dart that I let go

Bringeth unto weal or woe.

UBERTO. Aye : if thou miss not !

LUCREZIA. Uberto, prithee !

CUPID [*advancing toward ANTONIA*].

Lady, now to do my part,

’Gainst the fortress of thy heart,

Thus at thee I loose my dart.

[*He shoots an arrow which misses and is picked up by LUCIO.*]

ANTONIA. Thy dart hath strayed, Cupid.

CUPID. Nay, Lady : for Signor Lucio hath it ;
and soon will he have thee.

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BALDONE. He hath answered thee well, daughter !

ANTONIA. I doubt not,—being such a big Cupid.

CUPID. I will make thee a big lady ere nine months be gone.

UBERTO. What—thou ?

BALDONE. Come, come ! is this thy part ?

CUPID. No, sir : that will be Signor Lucio's.

BALDONE. A saucy rascal ! Go : keep to thy book !

What else ?

CUPID [*presenting a rose*].

Lady, this flower which did grow

Out of his love for Lucio,

Francesco sends to thee,

And, praying it may there find rest,

He bids me plant it in thy breast.

And happy mayst thou be !

ANTONIA. Thy rose was better aimed than thine arrow, Cupid. Tell the giver that I thank him.

CUPID [*presenting a cup*].

This cup to thee Rudolfo sends,

And when he comes will make amends

Of what it lacks for thee.

For then he 'll fill it to the brim,

And with such fortune make it swim,

That happy shalt thou be.

ANTONIA. Tell him I will have it ready ; and thank him.

[CUPID *makes as if to speak again, then stops.*

BALDONE. Well, hast thou any more to say ?

CUPID. There was more, sir ; but I have forgotten it. [*Music begins.*] This that comes now is our Lady of Fame ; to her follow others. All

THE BRIDE FEAST

this I was to say : and so having done, I take my leave ! *[He runs out.]*

LUCREZIA. A pretty Cupid !

UBERTO. And a confident,—that, having lost his way, found it again.

Enter FAME, attended by Trumpeters.

FAME. Where place and power once stood adored,
Time, the swift sower, comes and sows.
Wisdom and wealth, with wonder stored,
Have met dark Fortune's overthrows.
Down from his throne the monarch goes,
Back in its scabbard rusts the sword ;
But on the mount of Beauty blows
The blameless blossom of the rose ;
And like a summit crowned with snows
The stronghold stands where Love is lord.

Captain, and Councillors, and Kings,
Of all dominions and degrees,
Merchants that ship the heaving seas,
And every argosy that brings
The spiced East beneath its wings—
What use was theirs round world to rove,
All wars to win, all storms to prove,
Or by the fixed stars to move,
If, in the end, they have not love ?

When desolate on Naxos' sands,
Bright Ariadne wrung her hands,
And her grief for Theseus wasted,
Over the foam a fragrance blew
Of joys her heart had not yet tasted.
Then came Bacchus with his crew,—

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Shipt their oars, let down their sails,
Loosed to land the scented gales
Of their vineyards, which had borne them
Company across the foam :
For the vine-leaves, who hath worn them,
Where they twine shall find a home.
Drink of this immortal wine ;
Let the cup of joy be thine !

[Bacchic music is heard without. Revellers enter the garden, bearing BACCHUS upon their shoulders. They halt, and CUPID speaks.]

CUPID. Lady, here in my employ,
Bacchus comes to give you joy,
And here, close upon his track,
Troops of Folly at his back,
Comes the breaker of all rules,
Mate of mirth, the King of Fools.

[The Bacchanals move forward to the entrance.]

Enter behind them, to light music, other Revellers, bearing the KING OF FOOLS upon their shoulders.

Herald of the glad event,
I before their face was sent,
Rose and wine-cup to present :
Love and joy.

[The two troops of Revellers join instruments. At the entrance BACCHUS sits in pomp, mute and motionless, while the KING sings.]

KING. When day goes down,
When day goes down,
On the little hill-town of Assisi,

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In bridal crown,
And lily-white gown,
Oh, lay thee down and lie easy !
BACCHUS. With wine-cup red,
And rose-crowned head,
Oh, surely thy bed shall be easy !
For there shall be laid,
In the cool moon-shade,
The fairest maid of Assisi.

*Led in by CUPID, and singing together, they enter,
and stand ranged to right and left of FAME.*

KING and BACCHUS. Come, holy night,
Let stars show bright,
And wind from the south blow breezy,
To give delight,
And Love his right
In the fairest maid of Assisi !

[While BACCHUS and the KING OF FOOLS remain mounted, other Revellers move forward with music and dancing. A seat is placed for the bridal pair in front of the dais. CUPID leads them to it under a shower of roses and vine-leaves. BACCHUS and the KING OF FOOLS dismount and advance.]

KING [to ANTONIA]. Love was the Rose I sent.
Therewith, oh, be content !
As Love was given to me,
The gift was free.

BACCHUS. Joy was the Cup I sent.
Therein I'll find content,
Where hope lies dead. From me
The gift is free.

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KING. That rose, once mine, now thine,—
Oh, cherish still!

BACCHUS. That cup, once mine, with wine
Now let me fill.

[CUPID goes forward, receives the cup from
ANTONIA, and returning, holds it up while
BACCHUS pours in the wine.

This is the cup of my good will.
If but one drop of it thou spill,
Thou hatest me : but if thou drain
Deep, deep—I have thee mine again.

[His voice is strange : FRANCESCO turns, startled,
and looks at him.

BALDONE [uneasily]. Thine ?

RUDOLFO. In it are all my wishes. Oh, drink
deep!

ANTONIA [drinking]. 'Tis a sweet wine,—and
strange!

RUDOLFO. Aye.

ANTONIA. Taste it, Lucio.

RUDOLFO [snatching the cup]. By this hand, no!
My wine is given to thee,

And to no other! [LUCIO starts up.
Let Lucio live! A long life be thy doom!

[He throws the cup down.

FRANCESCO. How now, Rudolfo ?

ANTONIA. Oh, I am blind! [She staggers back.

LUCIO. Look! Look!

ANTONIA. All's darkness. Help! Where art
thou, Lucio? [She falls.

FRANCESCO. What hast thou done, Rudolfo ?

RUDOLFO. That which I swore. She's mine!

LUCIO. O coward, villain!

THE BRIDE FEAST

Hell hungers for the soul that could conceive
So damned a deed. Thither betake thee !

[*Drawing his dagger he rushes upon RUDOLFO.*

RUDOLFO catches up his hand and stabs him in
the side.

BALDONE. Hold, hold him, fellows !

RUDOLFO. I thank thee, Francesco !

Finish thy play ; cry ' Curtain.' . . . Exit ghost !

[*He fights his way out.*

BALDONE. After him ! Follow ! Let him not
escape !

[*Exeunt several in pursuit.*

LUCIO [*falling beside ANTONIA*]. Oh ! why am I
not slain ?

ANTONIA. Lucio, where art thou ? Lucio !

LUCIO. Here !

ANTONIA. I cannot find thee : hold me ! Let me
know !

LUCIO [*embracing her*]. Take ! Take ! Into thy
lips I 'll pour my life !

ANTONIA. Enough, no more ! My soul is filled
with thee.

Live, Lucio, live ! [She dies.

LUCREZIA. Sweet spirit ! from that prayer
Her breath returns not back.

BALDONE. O piteous sight !

Two lovers laid : and this their marriage night !

FRANCESCO. O fool ! fool ! fool !

Alas, this was my doing : the blame was mine.
I thought to have made peace ; and here instead
Of reconciliation have wrought death.

BALDONE. Evil past reckoning was in our midst.
What couldst thou know of it ?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

Go, some of you, and hither bring a bier
To bear away the body. This affliction
Hath struck too deep for words. See to it swiftly !
[Attendants go out. Gradually the Masquer-
aders follow. FRANCESCO goes and kneels by
LUCIO.

FRANCESCO [*touching him*]. Lucio.

LUCIO. Ah, no ! Francesco, let me be !
Dead, she lies dead ! This must I stay to see ?
Oh, 'tis not possible. I cannot live
Without her.

FRANCESCO. No ; thou canst not, Lucio.

LUCIO [*startled*]. What dost thou say ?

FRANCESCO. Thou canst not, Lucio.
For she and thou being one, where'er thou art
She will be also.

LUCIO. Ah, God ! What was it ?—that word I
have forgotten :
Something she said ?

[Bearers bring in the bier, and stand waiting.

FRANCESCO. 'Tis in thy soul ; and memory shall
restore it,
When thou canst bear it better.

[BALDONE signals. The Bearers lift the body
and lay it upon the bier. FRANCESCO takes
hold of LUCIO the while.

Lay down thy head,
And hold her in thine arms as in thy heart.

BALDONE. Nay ; for the time has come, and they
must part.

FRANCESCO. I pray you leave them ! They are
better thus
Than with our tenderest care we could provide them.

THE BRIDE FEAST

Leave them alone together. And you, fair comrades,
While ye attend without, take heart for us,
Lest by ourselves we break into weak atoms
And to our rising come again no more.
Be ye Love's instruments, and let your music
Fall on the night like dew, that she may feel it,
Soft where she lies.

[BALDONE *sings to an Attendant to close the curtains. All go out: LUCIO and FRANCESCO are left alone. FRANCESCO approaches, and bends over the dead ANTONIA.*

FRANCESCO. O Death! . . . O Sister Death!
Here hast thou found me out: and thy chill breath
I fear no more.

VOICES [*without*]. Come, come, sweet death of day,
And on her beauty lay

Life's crowning grace:
Of all that here lies lost one gift restore!
The light of vanished hours,
The ghosts of parted flowers,
Meet in that face

Which knows them now no more.

[*The singing goes softly on.*

LUCIO. Oh, look! look, what a star
Lost in deep night goes yonder!

[*He takes up the fallen wine-cup.*

This fatal cup, now emptied, could I share,
I would be with thee yet. O sweet, sweet
draught!

O comb of the yellow honey! form of wax,
Where once was warmth, come to my lips again!
Yea, to my lips! I'll taste thee till I die.

[*He kisses her. FRANCESCO goes apart.*

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

VOICES [*without*]. Beauty to have and hold,
Deep cup fulfilled with gold,
This was the joy

Wherewith from dawn to dusk she decked her hours.
All beauty now lies strown ;
Spilled from the cup has flown
The bright alloy.
Her wealth is withered flowers.

[*The singing ceases.*]

LUCIO. What is that singing ?

FRANCESCO. 'Tis the bride-bearers. Oh, sing on,
sing on !

If ye have melodies to heal man's woe,
Let these ears drink the sound !

VOICES [*without*]. Thus, with a dying race,
Day turns and doth embrace
Sweets passed to air ;

And stirless now around that starlit head
There lies a richer wreath ;
And secretly beneath
The fallen hair

The clasp of all things dead.

LUCIO. 'Of all things dead.' Whereof I, too, am
one !

[*He searches for his missing dagger, finds it,
and makes ready for death.*]

FRANCESCO [*as though unaware*]. Nay, Lucio, lay
thee down again, and rest !

This is thy bridal chamber. To her counsel
Commit thyself. Yonder her beauty lies
In love embalmed. So, as she bids thee,—be !

LUCIO. How—' be ' ?

FRANCESCO. Live, Lucio !

THE BRIDE FEAST

LUCIO. No.

FRANCESCO. And serve her still.

Come, ease thy heart ; take flowers, take flowers,
and strew !

[*He brings flowers and offers them to LUCIO.*

It profits not the dead : yet it gives comfort
Here to the living.

LUCIO. Comfort thyself, Francesco ; but I live not !
These things to me mean nothing.

[FRANCESCO *lays the flowers about the face,
hands, and breast of the dead* ANTONIA.

LUCIO *watches him for a while. Faint music
continues without.*

LUCIO [*suddenly catching his hands*]. Let be !
Let be ! Enough !

FRANCESCO. Oh, hear me, Lucio ; and forgive
this voice

That with its own grief breaks into thy sorrow !
I loved her with a love not less than thine ;
Inseparable from my thought she grew,
Till, in more love for thee, to me she died.
Her sweetness—all the mystery of that Rose
Rooted in heaven—out of my life was taken.
But in thy bliss I saw what might be mine ;
So gave my dream to thee ; which, through thy love,
Lived still. Take, Lucio, from my heart now take
This living dream, this love : keep it, 'tis thine !
My cherishing hath not stained it. Be it as safe
Now, henceforth, in thy keeping.

LUCIO. I'll take it to her, Francesco.

FRANCESCO. Aye, some day.

But by that road think not to find her now !
It lies too dark.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

LUCIO. 'Too dark' ? Where else dwells she ?

FRANCESCO. Surely in light, Lucio. We know it is so ;

Though with weak eyes we see not. Take up thy love,

And like fresh flowers pile it upon this earth,

Till thou hast made a monument more fit,

More worthy of her, that men beholding say—

'There proved stands Lucio's love,—in life not death.'

Owe her thy life, Lucio ! Death is but dust :

Sprinkle not that in ashes on her grave !

Meekly she means to plead for thee in heaven.

Lucio, shall thine be the first guilt she knows ?

What ? Shall thine own hands part thee from her for ever ?

Slay not that love which seeks its life from thee !

Thou'rt but a little house ; yet through thy window

She shines into the world, and makes—less dark.

[LUCIO falls down weeping upon the body.

Yea, take thy plunge in grief, and in that wave

Swim, and find strength ! Live on, and tell to others

How much we loved her !

LUCIO. Oh ! 'Tis not possible !

[But FRANCESCO knows that it now is ; and so prepares to leave him.

FRANCESCO. No word of mine

Henceforth shall trouble thee : I will be dumb.

But to thy heart,—her word, her dying word,

Which like a dove winged faint back to this ark,

That on dark waters floats and sees no shore,—

THE BRIDE FEAST

Her word, which was her prayer, this thou must
grant :

‘ Live, Lucio,—live ! ’

*[Leaving LUCIO alone by the dead body, he
retires apart ; takes up a lute, and in a low
voice sings—*

This love I gave to thee,
That bettered it might be,
From me it went not when to thee ’twas given :
Bestowed, it grows not less ;
That thou and I possess
This double-single, is the gift of Heaven !

Also her secret. Here
No parting doth appear :
This thing is one, whether thine eyes or mine
Be windows thereunto.
Here wisdom, searching through,
Finds Love at home : into God’s courts they shine.

So, in the broken bread,
Love, by Himself goes fed,
And finds release in each life-healing deed.
And, through all hands which serve,
We take, taste, and preserve
That life of endless love which fits our need.

*[He lays down the lute, puts out the lights one by
one, and goes out.*

CURTAIN



OUR LADY OF POVERTY



Scene: A Court of Love. Enthroned against a background of pinewood, in a formal garden adorned with fountains, sits the Queen of Beauty surrounded by her maidens. Soft music is playing, while the Prolocutor, thin and elderly, in legal attire, sets people to their places.

A flourish of trumpets is heard, and three of the combatants, RINALDO, UBERTO, and GIOVANNI, enter led on by a youth in herald's dress. Cloaked and hooded, each carrying an instrument of music, they halt and salute.

RINALDO. Prolocutor, have the lists opened ?

POMPILIO. Nay, tarry, good Signor ! Not yet, not yet ! [*He marshals them with his wand of office.*] Be thus far, but no further. Then, when I signify, ye shall advance, each to his part in turn : and I to mine.

UBERTO. Pompey is very full of himself, Rinaldo.

GIOVANNI. And yet sounds empty.

ISOLA. There comes Francesco.

MARGHERITA. Who with him ?

ISOLA. Lucio Leone.

JULIA. I feared he would not come.

MARGHERITA. Why, who ? Francesco ?

JULIA. Nay. I meant Lucio : having lately heard How deeply he still mourns.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

MARGHERITA. For his lost bride ?

JULIA. Unto his grief setting no bound nor limit
In time or content.

LAURA. And so proves the better
What worth he found in her.

*Enter FRANCESCO and LUCIO, cloaked and hooded ;
LUCIO in purple, FRANCESCO in grey diapered
with silver hearts.*

POMPILIO. Ye come late, Signors ; but in time.
Dress you to your places ! Is it your pleasure,
Lady, that we begin ?

MARGHERITA. Aye, call the Court ! Where is my
part, Pompilio ?
Give me that I may read it.

[POMPILIO hands her a scroll.

Nay, stand not by ;

I will con this for myself, and better know it
Than with you helping me.

[POMPILIO stands back, offended in his dignity.

SEVERAL. Call the Court ! Call the Court !

POMPILIO. Aye : but have patience ! There is
ceremony. Stand, and attend !

[*He signals, and the Herald blows his trumpet.*

This is the Court of Love, and this its Queen—

The Lady Margherita, to whom your pleas

Ye will address severally and in turn.

Courteously she will hear you, and will judge

But by your merits. Wherefor, and now, give heed

What task she sets you. It is your Queen that
speaks.

MARGHERITA [*reading from the scroll*]. Ye
servitors of Love, that hither come

OUR LADY OF POVERTY

To sound his praises, think you not to sum
By single speech that which embraceth all,—
Though how we know not. Earth he holds in thrall,
And every heart, how different so e'er,
Stands subject to his law, and of his care
Daily hath need . . .

[*To* POMPILIO] So far I read. Is my part ended ?

POMPILIO. Nay, Lady, there is a turnover.

MARGHERITA. Oh ! [*She turns the page.*]

Would ye weigh Love by touch, by sight, by tone ?
Nay, judge not by the outward sense alone,
But to your hearts look in, and there require
Whence, if ye did lack eyes, would spring this fire ?
Whence, if ye did lack hearing ? Or, say, whence
Would Love arise, were man left without sense ?
How think ye, sirs ? To him that best assays
Love with true worship, we award the bays.

POMPILIO. The lists are open. Servitors, are you ready ? Signor Rinaldo, begin !

[*RINALDO advances, gives his cloak into the hands of an Attendant, and stands resplendently arrayed. He takes his guitar and sings,*

RINALDO. Live and make, live and make
Honey, O my heart, and hive—
All care above—
Where in her breast, alive,
Dwells love !

POMPILIO. That is good : that is passing good !
Nay, how can it be bettered ?

MARGHERITA. Thine own making, Rinaldo ?

RINALDO. Thine, most sweet lady.

MARGHERITA. The honey, mean you, or the song ?

ISOLA. Nay, he says that *you* are the honey.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

MARGHERITA. Then who eats it ?

LAURA. Himself, so he proposes.

MARGHERITA. That can wait. We will hear others.

POMPILIO. Signor Uberto, the Court waits on you.

[UBERTO *uncloaks*.

UBERTO. My verse takes colour from Rinaldo's.

[*Sings*] So meets and sips my soul,
My soul with thine !
Ere this day closes,
At thy sweet lips for goal
I 'll quaff the wine
Which Cupid brews from roses.

POMPILIO. Now that is a deep song, and requires thinking. Oh but good, I say it is good !

MARGHERITA. Thou dost promise thyself a rich draught, Uberto.

UBERTO. Aye, truly, lady !

MARGHERITA. How wilt thou come by it, except she grant it ?

UBERTO. By mine eyes, lady ; for while they looked on thee, they drank !

MARGHERITA. Well, if that satisfies thee. Go thy way, Uberto !

JULIA. Uberto, she hath denied thee !

UBERTO. Sooth, I care not !—when I see others fairer.

POMPILIO. Signor Giovanni, hast thou aught to add to what these say ?

[GIOVANNI *uncloaks*.

GIOVANNI. Give and take, give and take,
No stings,
But such sweet things
In fairest hearts that lie !

OUR LADY OF POVERTY

So to the brink
I'll come to drink anew—
Not wine, not wine,
But nectar pure as dew,
Which from thy form divine
In beauty springs.

ISOLA. His heart is a very bucket, Margherita.
Wilt thou fill it for him ?

MARGHERITA. Would he get hence with it straight-
way, 'twere a temptation !

POMPILIO. And now, Signor Lucio, for our Queen
and this Court, what song have you ?

LUCIO. None, Signor.

POMPILIO. He says none, Lady. Then why is he
here ?

LUCIO. Truly I have a song ; but it belongs not
to the living.

MARGHERITA. If it belongs to love, Signor Lucio,
we shall do well to hear it.

LUCIO. Then if you will, Lady !

[He uncloaks and stands garbed in black.

*FRANCESCO takes his cloak, and plays his
accompaniment.*

LUCIO [*sings*]. Bear, bear away, Death,
Such sweets thou hast gathered !
No sweets are left in all the world for me.
Round her spent breath
Spring flowers lie scattered ;
Blue eyes, like skies, I may no longer see.

Over woods and streams
Come soft sounds of breezes ;
Such was her voice, which spake to me of late.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

Now, save in dreams,
Comes no sound that pleases
Ears more forlorn than Echo of her mate.

Yet rise, my heart,
And fail not there to find her,
Where, in true worth, dwell thoughts serene and
pure!

No space apart
Let dark distance bind her!
Share we, on earth, that life which shall endure!

[*As FRANCESCO strikes his lute for the next verse,
LUCIO stands mute and rapt. The playing
ceases. LUCIO moves slowly away, and un-
accompanied, continues singing. Passing
through the midst of the Court, he disappears
into the wood.*

From her bright worth
Shall Time, for ever moving,
Build up a shrine where Beauty may abide!
This deed on earth
Hath Love done for proving
How here for mortals all heaven lies wide.

Bear, bear away, Death,
All sweets of life departed!
Yet from true life no parting shall there be.
From her slain breath
Spring flowers arise young-hearted,
And her blue eyes make heaven over me.

[*The silence, in which they all stand listening
as the song dies away, is broken by the cold
precise voice of the Prolocutor.*

OUR LADY OF POVERTY

POMPILIO. Not good.

MARGHERITA. What wonder have we heard ?

Not by the words,
But by the grief and joy therein made one,
I judge that song the best ; and give the bays
To him—to Lucio.

SEVERAL. Good ! we are agreed.

POMPILIO. Your pardon, Lady ! Yonder still
waits one you have not heard : Signor Francesco.

MARGHERITA. Ah, I had forgot !
Signor Francesco, thou wilt pardon me.
I was too quick in honouring thy friend,
Not having heard thee.

[FRANCESCO *stands mute and motionless.*
Hast thou lost thy voice ?

FRANCESCO. No, Lady : only my heart.

ISOLA. What, again ? This is news, indeed !

[FRANCESCO *uncloaks, and stands in rags.*

MARGHERITA. Why, what is this, Francesco ?

FRANCESCO. The garb of love, Lady.

MARGHERITA. Art thou become so poor ?

FRANCESCO. Nay, I am rich. This is the livery
of her I love : and it cannot wear out.

MARGHERITA. What is her name, Francesco ?
May it be told ?

FRANCESCO. Our Lady of Poverty. Hast thou
never seen her ?

MARGHERITA. I have never heard of her. Where
dwells she ?

FRANCESCO. In hearts, Lady.

MARGHERITA. In whose, prithee ?

FRANCESCO. First in mine own ; and from me
goes to others.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

POMPILIO. Signor Francesco, thou art talking riddles.

This is no love-song. Come, amend thee, amend!

Let's hear no more of it: take up thy lute, And sing!

UBERTO. Tell us what she is like, Francesco! What face? What features?

FRANCESCO. Hear me, and I will.

RINALDO. To it, then! To it!

[FRANCESCO strikes upon his lute.

FRANCESCO. Listen! . . .

She is most bright, radiant, and beautiful.
Who serveth her, his heart stays ever young;
And wheresoever she goes free, he follows.
All that he hath is hers—what she hath, his:
And not, as Fortune, shall she turn away
The lover from her bounty.

[*He begins, still speaking, to make music for accompaniment.*

Fortune hath bonds, which Poverty unbindeth;
Fortune is blind, but Poverty hath eyes;
Fortune is fickle: Poverty is faithful;
Fortune is foolish: Poverty is wise;
Fortune diminisheth: Poverty increaseth;
Fortune departeth: Poverty stays yoked.
Is not puffed up,—doth not behave unseemly;
Thinketh no evil,—is not soon provoked.
All things she beareth, all things believeth,
All things she yieldeth, seeketh not her own.
Endureth, never faileth, comforteth, shieldeth.
So give I praise to Poverty alone!

[FRANCESCO lays down his lute.

OUR LADY OF POVERTY

POMPILIO. A very vile song ; a rascal of a song ;
a song without rhyme or reason !

GIOVANNI. And out of place, Francesco ; since
at this time

Our praise is not of Poverty but Love.

FRANCESCO. Poverty and Love are one, Brother.

RINALDO. How make you that ?

FRANCESCO. If you put cream in a churn, Rinaldo,
and turn it round and about,—what comes of it ?

RINALDO. Butter, thou fool.

FRANCESCO. So, if the fool put Love into his heart
And turn it well about,—even as butter from cream,
So out of Love comes Poverty.

MARGHERITA. What brought thee to this pass,
Francesco ?

FRANCESCO. Love, Lady.

MARGHERITA. Aye ? But tell us more of it.
For this is the strangest love-song that ever I heard.

FRANCESCO. There were three friends, Lady,
whose fortunes Love
Found hard to reconcile.

MARGHERITA. Do I not know that story ?

FRANCESCO. Had come a day when each with
separate eyes
Looked upon one, and loved her. Very fair
She was, Lady. So from that love came sorrow,
And fear, and hate, and jealousy, making foes.
Then from afar off I beheld that other,
My Lady of Poverty ; with her sweet eyes
She looked at me . . . tenderly. Then, seeking
comfort,
Still with a doubtful heart, I went to meet her.
And, as I went, hatred and jealousy left me :

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

And only sorrow remained. Then, as I came nearer,
Sorrow went from me also ; and I was glad.
For I knew, then, that I loved Poverty.

MARGHERITA. What happened then, Francesco ?

FRANCESCO. Because I loved her, I gave my
former love

To him that was her dearest. The rest thou knowest.
And now this day there be three living men.
And one hath lost his love : therefore is sorrowful.
And one hath cast off honour, faith, and friendship :
Therefore is miserable. But I have found
Sweet Poverty, and she is kind to me.
Therefore am I happy.

MARGHERITA. What wilt thou do, Francesco ?

FRANCESCO. Love, follow, serve.

MARGHERITA. Will nothing turn thee ?

FRANCESCO. Whither should I turn ?

Her ways lead everywhere.

MARGHERITA. Stark ways, and stern ;
But backward never ! So without rest or stay,
Goes thy to-morrow from thy yesterday.

Farewell, Francesco. Prolocutor, call the Court !

POMPILIO. Silence for the Queen !

MARGHERITA. Ladies and servitors, the lists are
over.

The crown is Lucio's.

*[The Court applauds. Music begins. The
ladies and servitors form a figure, and dance.*

MARGHERITA *takes the crown of bay and goes
to FRANCESCO.*

MARGHERITA. Lover of Poverty, wilt thou carry
this crown

To thy friend, Lucio ?

OUR LADY OF POVERTY

FRANCESCO. Very willingly, Lady.

MARGHERITA. For his song pleased me better than did thine. . . .

Tell him to lay it upon her grave, and say :
'This wreath of bay, from one whom lovers praise,
By my sweet song, in honour of thy dead days,
At Court of Love was won.'

Bid him say this !

And also—if she see

This world where we now live in such brief bliss—
Pray that she pray for me !

[She leaves him and joins the others, who are now about to leave. RINALDO, taking FRANCESCO'S cloak, throws it over his shoulder.]

RINALDO. Come ! Put on thy feathers again !
Art thou not coming with us ?

FRANCESCO. By your leave, no, Brother.

RINALDO. Why then, to our next meeting ! And the Lord make thee merrier !

FRANCESCO [*dreamily*]. Aye.

GIOVANNI. He heard thee not, Rinaldo. Truly he must be very much in love !

RINALDO. Francesco, of what colour ?

UBERTO. She is black, but comely.

MARGHERITA. Courteous gentlemen, your attendance.

Farewell, Francesco.

[They go out singing. FRANCESCO remains alone.]

[Song.]

Orpheus, thy charm,

Thy charm hath flown from earth.

How shall we guard from harm

Fair Beauty's worth ?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

How from the savage beast
Pluck tooth and claw,
And virtue hold released
From ancient law ?

Now, with a stronger charm,
Comes Love to earth,
Comes Love, and holds from harm
Our Lady's worth.
On rosy wings above,
Fair godhead, hail !
And in the Courts of Love
Let Love prevail !

[It grows dark : the song dies away.]

FRANCESCO. Farewell, gracious Lady !

[He starts, for the first time realising that he is alone. The sound of a bell approaches,—like a sheep-bell, dull and irregular.]

What is that sweet bell ?

[He takes his lute and plays response to it.]

Enter a LEPER, his face covered by a hood with eye-holes ; the bell hangs at his girdle. A lute-string breaks under FRANCESCO'S hand : he starts violently. The LEPER halts in front of him.

FRANCESCO [*fearfully*]. Who art thou, man ?

LEPER. No man : a leper.

FRANCESCO. Why art thou here ?

LEPER. Till I be rid of life, I must be somewhere.

FRANCESCO. Why art thou covered thus ?

[The LEPER raises his hand toward his hood.]

Nay ! not thy face ! I fear it !

LEPER. I have none. I am a rotten carcase,
waiting burial.

OUR LADY OF POVERTY

FRANCESCO. God !

LEPER. But I have still a hand, and a mouth that can be fed. Satisfy my need, and you shall be rid of me. [*The LEPER thrusts out a hand.*]

FRANCESCO. Ah ! Keep thy distance, Leper !
Get thee gone ! [*He shrinks back.*]

LEPER. I keep my distance till I die. Then rot takes all of us. We shall come together then, sure enough.

[*He moves off, his bell jangling as he goes.*]

FRANCESCO *stands struggling with himself ;*
the LEPER disappears.

FRANCESCO. Leper ! . . . O friend ! . . . O messenger of God, come back to me !

[*The LEPER returns and stands watching him.*]

LEPER. You called ?

FRANCESCO. Where dost thou dwell ?

LEPER. At the Lazaretto, of course. Where else ?

FRANCESCO. Are others there—like thee ? . . .
Speak !

LEPER. A few. In the world there be thousands of us—all waiting to die. Where we live no one enters. Men shun us : we shun ourselves. Our own bodies have become vile to us. God hates us. He has taken away our souls. We don't fear hell. Life has done that for us !

FRANCESCO. Do not fear hell !

LEPER. Fear is the getting there. Once you are in it, the fear is over.

FRANCESCO. O God o' mercy ! . . . Brother . . .
reach out thy hand !

[*FRANCESCO empties his purse into the extended hand, then kneels and kisses it.*]

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

LEPER. Why dost thou mock me,—kissing my dirty hand ?

FRANCESCO. O Brother, thy hand is cleaner than is my heart to Him I love !

LEPER. ' Love,' eh ?

FRANCESCO. But thou hast cleansed me : and my fear is over !

LEPER. Thy fear of what ?

FRANCESCO. Of thee, Brother,—and Death !

LEPER. Death ? Ho ! If I could get enough of him, I should do well with it. He 's too slow at it ; he nibbles, and nibbles, letting us die by inches.

FRANCESCO. Fair Brother, of thy charity pray for me !

LEPER. I—pray ? I pray for no man. What ? Do you think He 'd hear *my* prayers ? . . . If He did—there 'd be more lepers !

FRANCESCO. There are, Brother ; there are ! Under this cloak—Oh, take it, and be warm ! See the foul thing I am !

[He uncovers, disclosing his rags, and gives his cloak to the LEPER. The LEPER eyes him with an ugly laugh, as now for the first time comprehending.]

LEPER. Oh, ho ! So that 's the inside of it, is it ? When I go back, down yonder, and tell them this, they 'll not believe me. They 'll all say I dreamed it. . . . Here ! . . . How long have you been—mad ? Eh ?

FRANCESCO. I am not mad, Brother. God, through thee, has given me eyes !

LEPER. Eyes ? Lord ! you should see mine : —what 's left of 'em !

OUR LADY OF POVERTY

FRANCESCO. They see the same world, Brother ;
the same heaven.

LEPER. And the same hell ?

FRANCESCO. The life which we have made and
must all share.

O Brother, if thou canst not pray for me,
Remember without hatred one that seeks
Thy pardon and thy pity ! Till in God's time,
We two do meet again.

LEPER. In Death ?—' We two ' ; eh ?

[Shaking his head he moves to go.]

FRANCESCO. He being merciful, we *shall* meet,
Brother. Remember me !

LEPER. Aye, truly, I am like to remember thee,
when my time comes, to die ! If thou die first, my
bell shall toll for thee : though it knows not the
hour. Tell on ! . . . Tell on ! . . . Tell on !

[With a dull click of the tongue, he turns and goes.]

*FRANCESCO stands and listens till the sound of
his bell dies away.*

FRANCESCO. O most radiant, most gracious,
most sweet Lady of Poverty, now at thy hand I
have tasted the Body of Christ !

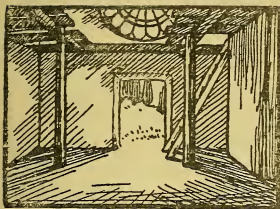
CURTAIN

PART II
THE FOLLOWING

THE BUILDERS.
BROTHER WOLF.
SISTER CLARE.

THE LEPERS.
SISTER GOLD.
BROTHER SUN.

THE BUILDERS



About the inner walls of a small ruined chapel stands scaffolding, across which rest the planks of a working platform. The floor is littered with wood, stones, mortar, and rubble. The sun shines through the wide open door and uncovered roof, and all the yellow-plastered walls gleam with the warm glow of reflected light. From aloft comes

the singing of the Builders; tap of trowel and stroke of mallet keep time to the refrain in which two voices join as the scene opens.

VOICES OF BUILDERS. O people, good people,
What news is to tell?
Ring-a-ding-dong! Ring-a-ding-dong!
The building goes well.

[To the open door comes a figure of quaint ugliness, wheeling a rough hand-cart loaded with stone. Here is JUNIPER. He enters, stands listening for a while to the singing overhead, then calls.

JUNIPER. Hi! Hi! . . . Ah! up in the sky, and can't hear me. I must just leave 'em.

[In heavy, slow-witted fashion he begins to carry in the stones one by one.

BUILDERS *[singing in antiphon].*

All girt with gold from crown to hem,
I saw great Michael stand;
The city of Jerusalem
He bore in his right hand.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

JUNIPER [*laying down his first stone*]. There 's one for you.

BUILDERS. O people, good people,
What news is to tell ?

Ring-a-ding-dong ! Ring-a-ding-dong !
The building goes well.

JUNIPER [*returning with a second*]. There 's another for you.

BUILDERS. Behold these walls of stately girth,
These towers which fall not down.
Now find for me some place on earth,
Where I may set my town.

JUNIPER. And there 's another. Lord help me !
When shall I get done ?

BUILDERS. O people, good people,
What news is to tell ?

Ring-a-ding-dong ! Ring-a-ding-dong !
The building goes well.

[*While one voice continues to sing aloft, FRANCIS comes down the ladder and sees JUNIPER entering with his fourth stone.*]

JUNIPER. There 's an——

[*He stops and stares at FRANCIS.*]

FRANCIS. Brother, where do these come from ?

JUNIPER. It 's my own house I 'm pulling down,
—to get rid of the rats.

FRANCIS. You brought stone yesterday.

JUNIPER. Ah, for Dom Silvestro that was. You said you could do with more, but hadn't the money.

FRANCIS. I still have not the money, Brother.

JUNIPER. No more have I. But I 've the stone.
There 's another for you.

THE BUILDERS

FRANCIS. You have a beautiful face, Brother. What is your name ?

JUNIPER. I—beautiful ? Had God made all the world like me, you 'd run away from it. Name ?—Juniper.

[*So saying he goes to fetch another stone.*]

FRANCIS. A good name : one of God's planting, for it bears fruit.

JUNIPER. Juniper, the fool, I am.—There's another for you.—That's what everybody calls me, who knows. And there's not a bigger fool in this world.

FRANCIS. Thank God for that, Brother. A good fool is a great work of mercy.

JUNIPER. For why, then ?

FRANCIS. God hath saved him without making him wise.

JUNIPER. Wise ? Oh ! had He made me wise, I should have died scratching my head over it. Here's another for you.

FRANCIS. Put them down outside, Brother. So much carrying tires you.

JUNIPER. And who am I that's not to be tired ? What else was I made for ?

FRANCIS. To give joy in heaven.

JUNIPER. The Lord help 'em if they are waiting to get it out of *me* !

FRANCIS. Why ? Are you not a stone-mason ?

JUNIPER. No, Master ! I'm doing this for play. A cobbler is my trade.

FRANCIS. Well,—a cobbler, then. Who gives more joy than a cobbler ? [*He begins filling a hod of mortar.*] He is the means by which we go, making

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

the way easy ; he saves us from stones and thorns, from the fangs of serpents, and from frost-bite. By his aid we make long journeys, seeing the world, and the wonder of it : Rome, and the Holy Land, and churches where priests say Mass : to cities also, and men's houses, making us become friends. Thus are we brought together in understanding and fellowship, which from the beginning was God's will concerning us. See, then, how good and joyful a thing it is to be a cobbler ! And he that gives joy on earth gives joy in heaven.

JUNIPER [*understanding according to the light that is in him*]. Will it give you joy, Master, if I make you a pair of shoes ? Oh, let me, for the love of God !

FRANCIS. As you will, Brother ; for by the love of God I see you are to be one of us.

JUNIPER [*stupent*]. I !

FRANCIS [*shouldering the hod*]. Farewell, Brother Juniper. Come again !

[*He mounts the ladder, and up aloft the singing is heard once more : ' O people, good people, etc.'*]

JUNIPER. Ah ! there he goes up to heaven again, with the feet of an angel ! And I might have kissed 'em had I been quicker. Oh ! was ever a thing born like him ?

Enter BROTHER BERNARD from without.

Was there, I say ?

BERNARD. Who are you, Brother ?

JUNIPER. Who am I ? I'm a great work of

THE BUILDERS

mercy, he says ; so I 'm not to tire myself. And I 'm to be one of you, he says. What does he want me for ?

BERNARD. To make us merrier, Brother. Is he up yonder now ?

JUNIPER. Aye ; that 's the way he went,—up into heaven. There you 'll find him.

[*He returns to his cart.* BERNARD stands looking at him.

BERNARD. And here have found thee. For I see thy heart, Brother ; and it is beautiful.

JUNIPER. What ? another of 'em. My heart, this time, eh ? Well, so long as it 's not my head ye 're after. For I 'm the greatest work of mercy ye ever saw in the way of fools.

BERNARD. We are all fools here, Brother. And with thee to lead us, we shall do well.

JUNIPER. Oh ? The Lord help you ! And what am I wasting time for, when I ought to be making those shoes for him ?

[*He goes back to his cart and begins putting off the stones outside.*

BERNARD. Shall I help, Brother ?

JUNIPER. No, you wouldn't. You 'd be in the way. . . . [*He stops and looks.*] There 's people coming up the hill, look.

BUILDERS [*aloft*].

Upon bare earth I laid my stone ;
He set his Tower thereon,
And from its top, with trumpets blown,
Back into heaven hath gone.

BERNARD [*calling from the foot of the ladder*]. Baa !

FRANCIS [*from above*]. Who is calling ?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

BERNARD. One of thy sheep—named Bernard. The world is seeking for thee, Brother.

FRANCIS [*as he descends*]. For me ?

BERNARD. Yonder, well attended, comes a thing of strange shape. Hither hath she followed me.

FRANCIS. She ?

BERNARD. Aye ! A woman in fine raiment, and of a comely countenance : with wealth and rank—so they tell me—new come from Rome.

FRANCIS. From Rome, to see *me*, Brother ?

BERNARD. Or now returning thither ; and in her train many servants. A very rich lady, by the look of her.

FRANCIS. And wishes to see me, you say ? How did she hear of me ?

BERNARD. From thy father, in Assisi. Alas, Brother, I think she is coming to buy thee back to him.

FRANCIS. God o' mercy ! Comes he also ? Hide me, Brother Bernard, hide me !

BERNARD. Nay, nay. He is not with her.

FRANCIS. Oh ! were he to come—what should I do ? Whither flee ?

[*So great is his perturbation that even the mild voice of JUNIPER, speaking outside, fills him with apprehension.*]

JUNIPER. Aye ; in there you 'll find him—if you look high enough.

[*The next moment GIACOMINA enters. Matronly, abundant, with a face all summer's day, exuberant in gesture and motion, she advances demonstratively to take possession of her quarry.*]

THE BUILDERS

GIACOMINA. Ah, there ! Heart alive ! I see thee again. Well met, by God's mercy !

FRANCIS. Well met, indeed, Lady ; for though I do not know you, I read that your heart is kind.

GIACOMINA. What ?—not know ? Dost not remember me ?

FRANCIS. Indeed no, Lady.

GIACOMINA. Why, thou monster of ingratitude ! Did I not love thee on first sight four years ago ? Have I not gone on loving thee ? Oh ! not to be remembered after that !

[Hot and out of breath she spreads herself, making the most of it.]

FRANCIS. 'Tis all one, Lady ; for now, without remembrance, I also love *you*.

GIACOMINA. Thou hast the face to say so ! Oh, let me sit and get breath !

[And so saying, regardless of dust, she sits down on a pile of stones, and fans with her veil.]

BERNARD, *considering himself not wanted, retires up the ladder.*

FRANCIS. The honesty : for, on so quick a meeting, there 's some that would not.

GIACOMINA. A soft-tongued rogue as ever ! And thy four-years-gone looks have not altered, but for the better.

FRANCIS. My four-years-gone self would not have thought so.

GIACOMINA. That bird ? That thing of feathers, —so plumed and combed, scarce could one see the man in him ? But, having discernment, I did so, and loved thee on faith ! Oh ! what a moulting is here ! And thou still but a fledgling. . . . What art doing ?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCIS. Cast out of one nest, I am now building another.

GIACOMINA. Here,—in this ruin ? Oh, the breath I have lost, running after thee !

FRANCIS. Where from, Lady ?

GIACOMINA. From Pietro Bernardone, thy father. Aye, thou mayst well hang thy head, if all he tells of thee be true.

FRANCIS. Tells what, Lady ?

GIACOMINA. This thing, this mouth, this monster, that for twenty years hath lain in his bosom, devouring first his affections, then his substance, and now his senses ! For now, the more to disown thee, he defames the mother that bore thee,—in thy shame discovering hers. Then, if I say—why waste time on a thing not his ? Straightway he claims thee again. So there's no end to it.

FRANCIS. You bring any message from him, Lady ?

GIACOMINA. Message ? No ! Maledictions, of such weight my tongue could not carry them. And thy mother—poor soul—how she weeps !—more tears than would keep me in grief for a twelvemonth. There is my kerchief, still wet from the encounter of her eyes,—a mother's love for thee !

[She throws him her handkerchief. FRANCIS takes and regards it tenderly.]

FRANCIS. Alas, fond wretch, thou hast wept well !

GIACOMINA. I told her she wept ill, and should be proud of thee !

FRANCIS. What said she to that ?

GIACOMINA. Falls to fresh weeping,—duty to thy father forbidding her to do otherwise : so in submission waters his curse with her tears, that out of

THE BUILDERS

it may spring blessing. He sows, she waters, thou reapest ; for though grief be in it there is comfort likewise. 'Tis not charged to me as a message, but *her* heart is not broken, I tell thee !—not by thee, at any rate.

FRANCIS. Oh ! that is sweet hearing. God bless thee for telling me.

GIACOMINA. Why, child ! 'tis like a rainbow on storm : not to see it, I should be blind. Oh ! but thy father ! There 's wreckage, there 's ruin for thee : his pride, and thy promise all gone to perdition !

FRANCIS. What brought thee to him, Lady ?

GIACOMINA. The good cloth I last had from him. So, coming to buy more—also to have new sight of thee, thou thing of forgetfulness !—here, there, I go looking for thee, where thou art not. 'Where is thy son, thy partner ?' say I ; and he, 'I have no son, no partner.' On that shuts mouth like a rat-trap, while thy mother opens hers and begins weeping. Oh, what a snap to these poor heart-strings was that ! 'Dead !' think I, drop a tear, and say a prayer for thee. Then out it all comes, as from the two I get thy story : she wailing, he railing ; she fond to thy folly, he by the folly of her fondness so enraged that he falls nigh to beating her ; and so measures thee to my mind, that here am I more hopelessly in love with thee than ever ! What more waits telling, he will say to thy face before the court, where presently he means to summon thee.

FRANCIS [*almost in tears*]. Alas ! Oh, whither shall I go now ?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

GIACOMINA. Why, heavens, child! What has come to thee?

FRANCIS. Oh that the earth would open and swallow me!

GIACOMINA. What voice of a mouse is this? Art thou not a man?

FRANCIS. Aye.

GIACOMINA. 'Aye'! Then what dost thou fear?

FRANCIS. My father!

GIACOMINA. Thy father? What is thy father?—one thou couldst break like a stick across thy knee.

FRANCIS. Yea: I know it.

GIACOMINA. Then why dost thou tremble?

FRANCIS. Because he loves me, and is angry with me.

GIACOMINA. He will get over it.

FRANCIS. And I—I do not love him! Oh, is not that horrible?

GIACOMINA. Pooh! Dost hate, dost wish him ill?

FRANCIS. Ah, no!

GIACOMINA. Or anything but what is good?

FRANCIS. Indeed no!

GIACOMINA. And for his grief is not thy heart tender?

FRANCIS. I hope so, Lady.

GIACOMINA. Why, then, he hath as much of thy love as he deserves. I have seen him, so know.

FRANCIS. Twenty years he was kind and patient to me.

GIACOMINA. And wast thou unkind?

FRANCIS. All he gave I took,—and now have

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wasted. All he hoped, expected, desired of me has come to naught. And it is my doing.

GIACOMINA. What did he think to make of thee? A goose to lay golden eggs? The better he should be disappointed. The Lord increase and continue it to him! Come, come, child! come!

FRANCIS. While I pleased him, loss of love did not matter. But now it comes like a curse!

GIACOMINA. Pah! Couldst thou, to please him, be other than thy nature?

FRANCIS. He was so to me. He loved saving, yet to me was bountiful: spared not to labour, but let me be idle: bound himself to business, set me free from it.

GIACOMINA. And did all this for love of thee?

FRANCIS [*after a pause*]. For my success in life, Lady.

GIACOMINA. Life? In what kind?

FRANCIS. That which I lived. Last year, at the call of comrades, I took service in the Pope's war.

GIACOMINA. To fight, eh?

FRANCIS. And to be their leader. He filled my purse, gave me horses, servants, arms fit for a prince. And there, at the city gate, he stood to watch me go. And as I passed, his eyes filled with tears, and he said to my mother: 'Look; we have a son who is a gentleman!'

GIACOMINA. By his cloth-yard, now have I measured him! Well, what else?

FRANCIS. Alas! two days after, I found I could not fight. So I returned.

GIACOMINA. Why? Wast thou afraid? When thy foe met thee, didst thou turn tail and run?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCIS. We did not meet, Lady. On the first day, as we marched, I stopped by an altar to pray ; and there before our Lord upon the Cross I found that fighting meant nothing, and the Cross everything. Then gave I horse and arms and servants to others that would take them ; and I went back—having done nothing. . . . That is all, Lady.

GIACOMINA. And thy father was not pleased with thee ?

FRANCIS. He said that I was a thief not to have brought back the full price of what he had given me. But how could I sell that which I knew to be useless ? So to make money would not have been honest.

GIACOMINA. Thou lamb ! Thou dumb thing ! Thou sheep before shearers ! Well, well, what else ?

FRANCIS. Nothing else, Lady. But truly I have done him great wrong, and he hath right to be angry. And being in his debt, now I fear him.

GIACOMINA. And so hast run away from him ?

FRANCIS. Yes. For every time he set eyes on me he was angry.

GIACOMINA. But if he had the right, why take it from him ? The poor man starves to have his teeth in thee ; that is all.

FRANCIS. All !

GIACOMINA. Listen, child, and learn wisdom ! Give him his vengeance till he be full of it : feed him till he be sick ! When he pursues after thee, do not thou run away. Offer thyself up ; say, ' Take, eat, be satisfied ! ' If he wishes to beat thee, let him ! If he would strip the clothes off thy back, let him ! If he would turn thee out naked

THE BUILDERS

into the world, let him ! Give him his glut of the meat his soul loveth, and he shall be out of heart in a fortnight. And so having surfeited him, thou wilt have paid thy debt.

FRANCIS. And so be free ?

GIACOMINA. Aye, no longer fearing him. Therefore be ready ; for I think he means to come after thee.

[This gives FRANCIS a fresh shock ; but he bears it better, suppresses the cry which rises to his lips, and stands his ground. Having done him this good turn, GIACOMINA abruptly changes the conversation.]

GIACOMINA. So this is thy roost now ? How long hast thou been here hiding thyself ?

FRANCIS. About a fortnight, Lady.

GIACOMINA. What doing ?

FRANCIS. Building.

GIACOMINA. By what means ?

FRANCIS. Stone, Lady, and wood, and mortar. And we be three men, with six hands, and three heads, and one mind. And Brother Wall is kind to us ; we sing to him, and he grows.

GIACOMINA. Where get you the stone ?

FRANCIS. We buy it, when it is not given us. Yesterday we had money, and bought some. Yonder friend brought it to us : to-day he brings more as a gift. And when we need more, doubtless more will come.

[Since the coming of GIACOMINA, JUNIPER'S unloading of his cart has been slow work. With dazed senses, at the lifting of every stone he stands and gazes at the apparition, and

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

having laid it down stops to gaze again. Now that she turns to look at him he is covered with confusion, retires, and shifts his cart so that he may continue his work unobserved. Thereafter you see the unloading, but not him, till presently he comes to make his departure.

GIACOMINA. What art thou building here for ?

FRANCIS. This is the Church of St. Damian, Lady ; it had fallen into ruin ; no one cared for it, no one prayed in it : 'twas our Lord's house, but empty. We are building so that He may come again and live in it. Presently it will have a roof ; then an altar, and a bell, and a priest who will say Mass. Then He will come. Will not that be wonderful ?

GIACOMINA. Aye ! wonderful, indeed ; most wonderful !

FRANCIS [*with the mazed look of a visionary*]. Till by the showing of love He taketh our wonder from us.

GIACOMINA. That is a strange saying, little Brother,—but true. . . . Didst thou begin this of thyself ?

FRANCIS. Aye ; and now there be three of us ; and to-morrow we shall be four.

GIACOMINA. Who finds you the money ?

FRANCIS. Our Lord brings it.

GIACOMINA. By what hand ?

FRANCIS. All hands are his, Lady.

GIACOMINA. Then, in God's name, from mine take this ! [*She gives him a purse.*] Wait, wait ! . . . and this ; and these !

[*She takes off gold chain and jewels, and offers them. To free his hands FRANCIS lays down*

THE BUILDERS

the purse, which is a pouch drawn through a ring. As he does so, the ring slips, and the pouch lies open on the stone disclosing its contents. The chain and jewels he puts into his wallet. It is at this moment that JUNIPER, departing with his hand-cart, stands to take a farewell look at the two objects of his adoration. Like a child in fairyland, he gazes open-mouthed at the poured-out treasure ; then goes.

GIACOMINA. There ! now am I lightened of my load, and have done with it ! . . . God o' mercy ! What art thou staring for ?

FRANCIS. This is more than we need, Lady.

GIACOMINA. Not more than the world needs, Brother. Here is but a beginning.

FRANCIS [*uplifted at hearing his dream spoken*]. Oh ! Thou hast come to tell me that !

GIACOMINA. Has not thine own heart told thee ? Have not others ? Whence came these ?

[*She indicates the Builders, whose voices are again heard up aloft.*

FRANCIS. I opened my hands ; and He filled them. I did not ask them to come.

GIACOMINA. But they came.

FRANCIS. And then—you came.

GIACOMINA. All the world will come, Brother, when they know thee.

FRANCIS. When they know each other. . . . So the building will go on !

GIACOMINA. And the bells will ring !

[*Happy in their dream, they stand looking at each other. To the door without comes DOM*

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

SILVESTRO, *and halts to look in. Up above, as they ply their tools, the Builders sing in chorus.*

BUILDERS. O people, good people,
What news is to tell ?

Ring-a-ding-dong ! Ring-a-ding-dong !
The building goes well.

FRANCIS. Thy name, Lady ?

GIACOMINA. Giacomina da Settisoli.

FRANCIS. Sister Giacomina.

GIACOMINA. With all my heart, Brother ! That also goes to thy building.

FRANCIS. When we meet again, we shall remember each other.

GIACOMINA. ' We ' ! The forgetting was never mine !

[DOM SILVESTRO *enters, and sees the gold lying. With a divided attention he advances toward them.*

FRANCIS. I only forgot thy face, not thy heart ; for then I had not found it. . . . Come again, Sister.

[*They embrace in frank affection.*

GIACOMINA. Doubt not, Brother ; I *will* come ! Oh, is not the world beautiful ?

FRANCIS [*full of a like discovery*]. Aye !

SILVESTRO. Master Builder, I would have a word with you.

FRANCIS. Very willingly, Father. Lady, this is Dom Silvestro, priest of San Giorgio.

GIACOMINA. Your blessing, Father.

[DOM SILVESTRO, *making the cross, mumbles a perfunctory blessing in Latin.*

FRANCIS. He hath been a good help to us.

THE BUILDERS

Yesterday we bought stone from him ; and because we make good use of it, he asked little.

SILVESTRO. Aye ; that was yesterday. Yesterday you said you were poor.

FRANCIS. We are poor still, Father.

SILVESTRO. Oh, ho ! Then what is this gold I see ?

FRANCIS. That is for the building.

SILVESTRO. To buy stone, eh ?

FRANCIS. If you have more for us.

SILVESTRO. I have no more.

FRANCIS. Then we must buy of others.

SILVESTRO. And give them a better price than you gave me ?

FRANCIS. We must give them what they ask, Father.

SILVESTRO. So—if they ask more, they will get more ?

FRANCIS. Yes, Father.

SILVESTRO. Then must thou give me more for mine.

FRANCIS [*puzzled*]. For what I have already bought of thee ?

SILVESTRO. Surely ! Seeing that I came first, is not that fair ?

FRANCIS. If it seems fair to thee, Father. Hold out thy hand, and let me fill it for thee.

[*To the door comes an old BEGGAR, leaning on a staff.*]

BEGGAR. Charity ! Kind Charity !

[FRANCIS takes up the gold and pours it into DOM SILVESTRO'S hand. Several pieces fall to the ground.]

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCIS. If I have not given thee enough, come again.

SILVESTRO. Enough! Nay, here is too much. Thou hast given me all.

FRANCIS. Put back what you do not want, Father.

[DOM SILVESTRO stands holding the gold, not knowing what to do. Meanwhile the BEGGAR has entered, and now approaches FRANCIS.]

BEGGAR. Kind Charity!

FRANCIS. Come in, little Father! Here is one of our friends, Sister. When we give him bread, he gives us his blessing; and we have done well by it. But to-day we have no bread for thee.

BEGGAR [*crestfallen*]. Eh? No bread?

FRANCIS. None has come; so we are as hungry as thou art.

BEGGAR [*accepting the situation*]. Eh! the Lord bless it to you!

FRANCIS. See, Sister, how good he is to us. Though we give him no bread, yet he blesses us.

[Meanwhile DOM SILVESTRO has made up his mind about the money. Shame has come to him; unwilling to keep all, or to be seen picking out a portion, he lays it all down, and is retiring unobserved, when FRANCIS stoops and begins gathering the fallen pieces.]

But look! though we have not bread, here is that which shall buy it for thee. Take what you need, little Father.

[This offering of gold to a BEGGAR gives a start to DOM SILVESTRO. Halting, astonished, upon the threshold, he waits to watch results. The

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BEGGAR, *looking at the handful offered him, is more nonplussed than* DOM SILVESTRO.

BEGGAR. But all this is gold, Master !

FRANCIS. I have nothing better, Brother.

BEGGAR [*bewildered*]. Eh ! what 'll I do with it ? I can't buy bread with gold, can I ? With gold you do buy land and houses, and jewels and fine raiment ; but what use to me would they be ? I've never touched a piece of gold all my life, Master ! I be afeard of it ! For if I have gold, I lose Charity. No, no ! Keep thy gold, I say, and give me Charity.

FRANCIS. Little Father, if all men loved Charity as thou dost, the world would be rich !

[*He goes to put down the gold, and then finds that all the rest has been returned to him. DOM SILVESTRO comes forward and kneels.*

SILVESTRO [*to the BEGGAR*]. Old man, give a sinner thy blessing ! This for thy need [*he presses a coin into the BEGGAR'S hand*] ; and this for thy charity !

[*Kissing the old man's hand, he turns and goes swiftly out.*

GIACOMINA. Making four, Brother !

FRANCIS [*with his mind on JUNIPER*]. Making five.

[*Meanwhile the old BEGGAR, slowly recovering from the shock of having his hand kissed, becomes articulate again.*

BEGGAR. Eh ? What for did he do that, now ? [*Then looking at the smaller coin which DOM SILVESTRO has given him*] Oh, but this is more like ! With this I can buy enough for all of us. Shall I, Master ?

FRANCIS. If thou canst spare of it. But ere thou

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

go, friend, give me a father's blessing! For my other father hath put a curse on me.

BEGGAR. Thy other——? Oh, there, there! The Lord bless thee, my son! and keep thee, and comfort thee, and be kind to thee, as thou——

BERNARD and LEO [*from above*]. Baa! Baa! Brother Francis! Brother Francis! Here, afar off, comes Messer Bernardone, thy father.

FRANCIS. My father——!

GIACOMINA [*lifting a warning finger*]. Now! . . . Be a man, Brother! Stand . . . Do not run!

FRANCIS. Oh! [*And once more fear and trembling take hold of him.*]

GIACOMINA. What is thy fear?

FRANCIS. He is coming to curse me!

GIACOMINA. Let him!

FRANCIS. To curse me! Oh! . . . [*Suddenly he catches the old BEGGAR by the sleeve*] Little Father!

BEGGAR. Aye.

FRANCIS. Stand close to me! Hold me! Be by me! Put thy hand on me! . . . Aye, so. And when I say 'Father!' say 'Here am I, my son.' Then if he curse me, say 'I bless thee.' If he say—aye, whatever he saith, do thou unsay it for me.

BEGGAR. Unsay? How unsay, Master?

FRANCIS. Wait: let him speak. Then, if it be evil, say thou the contrary, and make it good. Do this for me that I may live!

[*At this moment PIETRO BERNARDONE, a small, wizened old man, prances in. Shaking his stick, he rushes upon FRANCIS.*]

PIETRO. Ah! now have I found thee at last! Now have I tracked thee!

THE BUILDERS

BEGGAR. Now have I lost thee, again.

PIETRO. Thou form of folly! Thou shape of mischief!

BEGGAR. Thou son of my soul!

PIETRO. Thou fraud, thou trickster, thou thief!

BEGGAR. Thou heart of honesty! Thou child of innocence!

FRANCIS. Father.

PIETRO. Out! Call me not father!

BEGGAR. Call me father!

PIETRO. Thou art my son no longer.

BEGGAR. My son, if ever I had one.

PIETRO. What mocking and mouthing is here? Who art thou?

BEGGAR. This—this is my son, Master.

PIETRO. Thy son? I would to the devil he were!

BEGGAR. I would to God he were not! Nay, nay! Oh, what am I to say now?

PIETRO. Say, nothing! Hold thy peace. 'Tis I that am to speak now—to thee, aye, to thee! If thou prosper after this, there is no God in heaven.

FRANCIS. Kind Father, why art thou still angry with me?

PIETRO [*inarticulate with rage*]. Ah!

BEGGAR. I am not angry.

FRANCIS. If, after punishing, thou hast not forgiven me,—why didst thou punish me?

PIETRO. My punishments of thee have but begun!

BEGGAR. My punishments of thee are all over.

PIETRO [*striking at the BEGGAR with his stick*]. Out, fool!

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

BEGGAR [*poking* PIETRO *with his staff*]. In, Solomon! In! . . . Strike me not, Master! for I am hasty of temper.

[*The noise of the altercation has brought LEO and BERNARD from their work, and for some while they have stood half-way down the ladder looking on, bewilderingly divided between the laughter of GIACOMINA and the sorrowful ejaculations of FRANCIS.*

GIACOMINA. Have a care, Messer Pietro! His staff is longer than thine.

FRANCIS. If the sight of me causes thee anger, why didst thou come?

PIETRO. To claim that which is mine.

BEGGAR. To claim that which is not mine.

PIETRO. Where are my goods, my money, my horses that you took?

BEGGAR. I ask not where.

FRANCIS. I know not, Father. But some one is still using them.

PIETRO. As I will use thee! [*Strikes him.*

BEGGAR [*interposing*]. Nay, nay, Master; my son is not to be struck! He is a good son to me.

GIACOMINA. Messer Pietro, thy son is richer this day in the wrath and malice thou hast against him, than ever he was in thy love.

FRANCIS. Ah! no, no! Thy blessing, Father!

PIETRO. The devil's blessing! Plague take thee! Ruin fall on thee! Perdition seize thee!

FRANCIS [*kneeling before the* BEGGAR]. Little Father, *quick!* Thy blessing!

THE BUILDERS

BEGGAR. The Lord bless thee, my son. The Lord——

[*With a cry of rage, PIETRO raises his stick and rushes at the BEGGAR, who bolts pursued by PIETRO. GIACOMINA runs after them to the door. LEO and BERNARD join her, while FRANCIS, half-dazed, rises slowly from his knees.*

GIACOMINA. There is a riddance for thee! Run, Beggar. Run, Bernardone! Run! Run! . . . Nay, but quicker! He is after thee, he is on thee, he will catch thee!

LEO. Alas! he falls!

BERNARD. Bernardone is beating him!

GIACOMINA [*clapping her hands*]. Ah! see there! See there! Well done, Beggar! Well done! Bravo! Bravo!

[*LEO and BERNARD run out in haste to the rescue.* Now God reward thee, that once on earth I have seen justice done! Ah, well! Mercy and truth have met, and now it is over. Bravo, Beggar! . . . Oh! what heart of wickedness have I in me?

[*Turning she meets FRANCIS, and bars his way to the door.*

Nay, nay! Not there art thou needed but here. O good little Brother, pray for me! I am a great sinner. I have seen that would make me merry, were it the day of my death!

FRANCIS. Seen what, Lady?

GIACOMINA [*hopeless to convey to FRANCIS her own appreciation of the event*]. I cannot tell thee. Thou 'lt hear of it when I am gone. . . . Farewell, little Builder, farewell! We shall meet again.

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FRANCIS. Aye, surely ! Farewell, Lady ;—Sister Giacomina. Must thou go ?

GIACOMINA [*from the doorway*]. Be of good cheer, Brother ! All the world is a-building ! . . . And here comes another stone for thee. God bless and keep thee ! . . . Farewell !

[*Throwing him a kiss, she goes.*

FRANCIS [*uplifted with sweet thoughts*]. Farewell, Sister ! ‘ All the world ! ’ . . . ‘ All the world ! ’ . . .

[*While he stands mazed, back come BROTHER LEO and BROTHER BERNARD, forerunners of something which they have a difficulty in explaining.*

BERNARD. Brother Francis !

FRANCIS. All the world——

LEO. Brother Francis !

FRANCIS. Is a-building ! [*Then coming to himself*] Yes, Brother ?

[*To the door comes JUNIPER wheeling his hand-cart : in it lies PIETRO BERNARDONE, a crumpled wreck, with bandaged head, whining, and very sorry for himself.*

JUNIPER. I have brought thy father, Master.

FRANCIS. Alas ! How comes this ?

JUNIPER. The beggar has been beating him, Master.

FRANCIS. Oh ! unhappy wretch ! I have two fathers that beat each other !

JUNIPER. He’s not much hurt, Master : only frightened. Here ; out with you !

[*So saying he tilts his cart, and projects PIETRO through the doorway. Full of aches and noisy complainings, he staggers forward and sits*

THE BUILDERS

down on the pile of stone where GIACOMINA'S gold is lying.

PIETRO. Oh! you hired that ruffian to beat me, did you? Hired him! I'll have the law on all of you!

FRANCIS. But, Father, why didst thou beat him? Here was I: why didst thou not beat me?

PIETRO. Beat thee, eh? I'll beat thee yet; and more than ever thou didst bargain for!

[Suddenly his eye lights with avidity on the gold.

Where does this money come from?

FRANCIS. It was given me.

PIETRO. Given thee? . . . Oh . . . Given thee. . . . So that thou might pay thy debt, eh? . . . And for that beating I have had from thee? . . . Eh? . . . Stand away! Do not touch me! . . . Given thee. . . . So.

[Slowly and methodically he pockets the gold, while the three Brothers look on without protest.

JUNIPER. O Lord up in heaven! Look at that now!

[PIETRO, having filled his pouch, gets up to go.

FRANCIS. Farewell, Father: thou hast done well. Now I owe thee nothing—except love.

[PIETRO says nothing. Turning a look of hatred and malignant triumph on his son, he goes his way. After a pause, FRANCIS, gathering his tools, prepares to resume work. Suddenly he starts singing; and the two Brothers, LEO and BERNARD, join in.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCIS, LEO, and BERNARD.

Upon bare earth I laid my stone ;
He set his Tower thereon,
And from its top, with trumpets blown,
Back into heaven hath gone.

[They go up the ladder

O people, good people,
What news is to tell ?
Ring-a-ding-dong ! Ring-a-ding-dong !
The building goes well !

JUNIPER. Who ever saw the like of that !

CURTAIN

BROTHER WOLF



Scene: A rocky defile, gloomy and precipitous. High up in the crevices of the rock grow juniper bushes and pines. Over the ground, which is the pebbly bed of a dried torrent, large boulders lie strewn. To the right is a deep fissure, or cave, from which trickles a small stream of water. Behind the bushes above, one sees the back of a sheep and

a horned head which turns to look, as GIUSEPPE, hot and out of breath, comes stumbling up the gully from below. He halts, looks right and left, then puts his hands to his mouth and makes the wolf's cry.

GIUSEPPE. Wow! Wow! . . . Wow! Wow!

BARTOL [*from above*]. B-a-a!

GIUSEPPE. Hullo, Bartol, where are the rest?

BARTOL. Anywhere, for all I know. Here am I.

GIUSEPPE. I've news for them.

[He sits down, pulls a melon from his pouch and starts slicing it.]

BARTOL [*still wearing his sheep-skin, straddles the rock*]. Eh? Where does that come from?

GIUSEPPE. Down yonder: Assisi market. Here! Catch! [*He throws him a half-melon, which BARTOL begins eating.*]

BARTOL. News, eh? Well, what is it?

GIUSEPPE. One telling's enough. Call Lupo: bid him be quick.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

BARTOL [*first howls, then barks*]. Ow-w-w! . . .
Wow! Wow!

VOICE [*in the distance*]. Ow-w-w! . . . Wow! Wow!
[GIUSEPPE *begins to unload his pouch: his pilferings are mainly articles of leather or steel; mixed with these are a few gewgaws, satisfying to male vanity.*

GIUSEPPE. O Lord! what fools there are in the world! I could have taken double had I wanted.

BARTOL. Easy enough in a thick crowd. See them now, down yonder, swarming through the gate like ants! [*He points forward.*]

GIUSEPPE. Aye? Market's over now. They'd got a preaching friar among them. When he began, they'd no eyes for anything. . . . Suited me well enough!

BARTOL. What? That Poverello, as they call him?

GIUSEPPE. I daresay. Hungry-looking,—all eyes and a mouth. Ugh! Moon-mad: you should have heard him!

VOICE [*now nearer*]. Wow!

BARTOL. B-a-a! Cecco? Tell Messer Lupo it's Giuseppe back again.

Enter CECCO *and* BASTIANO.

BASTIANO. Any luck? . . . Oh!

GIUSEPPE. Where's the Wolf? Quick; I want him!

Enter LUPO, *a fine figure of a man, with a touch of the savage dandy about him. He wears chained coins and ear-rings. He stands and looks out over Assisi.*

CECCO. Lo, behind you, Brother.

BROTHER WOLF

LUPO. Ha ! you lice ! Look at them ! Curse, curse on you !

GIUSEPPE. Now, Messer Lupo, show yourself a wise wolf, and run ! There 's a holy man after you.

LUPO. Heh ? What 's he ?

GIUSEPPE. Mad ! That 's all I know.

BARTOL. It 's the Poverello, Padrone.

[Spreading them on a slab of rock, the Robbers settle down to divide GIUSEPPE'S pickings among them.]

LUPO. Does his madness bring him here ?

GIUSEPPE. Aye ! He is coming to catch you, Messer Lupo. That hath he sworn, with the whole city to witness. And as he so spake, Porco di Dio, you should have heard them !

LUPO. Go on, go on, Giuseppe ! Make shorter tongue, and have done with it !

GIUSEPPE. 'Tis thus, Messer Lupo. He is coming with holy water ; and terror will be on you ! First he strikes you blind, then deaf, then dumb, then silly. Then when he hath hold of you by all your senses, he 'll pick you to pieces, put you in a bag, salt you down, carry you back to Assisi, ring the bells—(He told them that : ' To-night, ring the bells ! ' he said)—Then they 'll call a feast . . . then they 'll eat you.

LUPO. You dirty thief, you have been drinking !

GIUSEPPE. Dirty thief am I ? Yes, I have been drinking—with my ears too : else you wouldn't be hearing of it. It 's the talk of the taverns I 'm telling you, and it 's the truth. So now, old Wow-wow, you know what your end 's going to be !

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

LUPO [*threateningly*]. Get! Stand up! Hands away!

[GIUSEPPE *puts up his hands ; fright sobers him*. Now then! Clean your tongue! Out with it!

GIUSEPPE [*stammering*]. 'Tis as I said, Messer Lupo; and as I heard it. Afterwards the Poverello himself was there speaking in the market. And he said—— [*He pauses*].

LUPO. Aye, said: said what?

GIUSEPPE. I—I don't know, Messer Lupo! 'Tis all gone from me. He talked such moon-madness, 'twas more than a sane man could understand. 'Twas all 'Brother Wolf,' and 'Brother Wolf,' and 'If you try to eat him,' he says, 'he tries to eat you. But we'll have him,' he says, 'so that he can harm nobody.' And there was the crowd all laughing and crying round him, like a pack of fools. So he said if he brought you back to Assisi, safe and bound, would they give you to him to do with as he wished. And they all said 'Aye!' And he said, 'Let me have his life, and you shall have peace!' So they agreed. And—[*he stops*—that was all, Messer Lupo. For I'd got my sack full by then, and 'twas better I came away.

LUPO. Aye, so? 'Safe and bound'; have my life, will they?

CECCO. You've had a many of theirs, Messer Lupo!

LUPO. And will have more! Ah, you blind bats! [*Shaking his fist towards Assisi*] Wait, wait, till my whelps be grown! . . . Up, Bartol, to your post!

[BARTOL *resumes his sheep-skin and returns to his perch*].

BROTHER WOLF

GIUSEPPE. They have a great fear of you, Messer Lupo.

LUPO. They do well.

GIUSEPPE. None will go forth of the city now, but armed and in company.

LUPO. It shall not save them.

CECCO. No, nor their flocks, either.

GIUSEPPE. Ah! And you should hear the farmers talk of all the sheep and goats we have taken. For every one that is true they tell of ten. So now, with so many missing, they say, there be fifty of us!

LUPO. And we will be fifty yet! Ah, you dogs, you dogs! When I have gathered my pack I will make you yelp!

OTHERS. Where are the rest, Messer Lupo? Where are the rest of us?

LUPO. They come, they come, Brothers. Patience! You are but the first.

ALL. Wow! Wow!

LUPO. Then, then we will taste blood!

ALL. Wow! Wow!

LUPO. And go forth with sword and fire!

ALL. Wow! Wow!

LUPO. And lo, Assisi, red-eyed and roofless, glaring into the dark!

ALL. Assisi, Assisi! Down with Assisi! Wow! Wow!

LUPO. Aye, hearken to me, now! You beat me, you stoned me, you cast me out! So, like a beast you hunted me! I sought justice; it was denied. You mocked me: you would not hear.

ALL. Ow-w-w! Wow! Wow!

[LUPO *draws his dagger for pantomime.*]

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

LUPO. Over his head by night, I burned the roof of my betrayer; and with sharp teeth I bit my way through the midst of them. 'Wolf! Wolf!' They were up, they were after me!

ALL. Wow! Wow! Wow! Wow!

LUPO. They shut the gates, but I was over the wall. 'Wolf! Wolf!' they cried, but too late. I was out, I was free.

ALL. Wow! Wow!

LUPO. Then you came, Brothers: for you, also, they had wronged. And together we have taught them fear! Cry, cry! Let them hear the voice of the Wolf!

ALL. Wow! Wow!

LUPO. Dogs!

BARTOL. Baa-a!

[At this cry of warning from above, LUPO goes to look.]

LUPO. Back! Take cover, all of you.

[The Robbers disappear. LUPO and CECCO enter the cave; GIUSEPPE creeps under a pine-root, BASTIANO behind a large boulder; BARTOL keeps cover under his sheep-skin. Enter FRANCIS, followed by JUNIPER, carrying a sack.]

JUNIPER. Not so fast, Father Francis! Oh, for the love of God, not so fast!

FRANCIS. Are you weary, Brother?

JUNIPER. Truly no, Father; not weary. But this is an ill place we be come to.

FRANCIS. Wherefor?

JUNIPER. Eh! dark, I mean.

FRANCIS. Further on it will be darker.

BROTHER WOLF

JUNIPER. Aye, and rough stones, Father, to stumble over ; and holes to fall into ; and torrents to get drowned in ; and caves—*[He turns and sees FRANCIS approaching the entrance of the cave]*—Oh, for the love of God, don't go there, Father ! There 's somebody in it !

FRANCIS. Sister Water is there, Brother. If she fears not, why should we ?

JUNIPER. Eh, but she is coming out as fast as she can run.

FRANCIS. She is kind, Brother : and because we are thirsty she runs to meet us. *[He stoops to drink.*

JUNIPER *[holding back]*. I shouldn't wonder, Father, but there 's blood in it. *[A stone followed by rubble falls from above.]* O Lord, what 's that ?

FRANCIS. Come, drink, Brother. This water is cool and clear, and will refresh you. Further on, we may find none.

JUNIPER. Are we to go further, Father ? Why are we to go further ?

FRANCIS. To find Brother Wolf.

JUNIPER. The Lord preserve us from him ! What 's in this bag, Father ?

FRANCIS. Food, Juniper, and wine, and raiment.

[He sets it upon a rock in the foreground. LUPO, followed by CECCO, comes and stands in the entrance of the cave. The other Robbers raise their heads cautiously to listen.

JUNIPER. What will the big robber want with that, Father ?

FRANCIS. Foi his body—it is all that he *can* want.

JUNIPER. I think not, Father. What he wants is blood, and terror, foul lust, and cruelty. He

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

puts men in bonds, Father ; he draws out their insides ; he pulls out their teeth ; he cuts off their ears ; he tears out their hearts ! Oh !

FRANCIS. So will I do to him, Brother.

JUNIPER. *Thou, Father !*

FRANCIS. Ere this day is over, Juniper, thou shalt see Brother Wolf in bonds. Yea, I will draw out his inside, and his teeth shall not harm me. I will have him by the nose and the ears ; and I will pull out his heart.

[At this, from LUPO and his robber-band, there is much grinding of teeth. They begin to close in on FRANCIS, who, taking the sack from JUNIPER, has begun to sort out its contents. They sit down on a rock to rest.]

JUNIPER. Well, Father, if it be God's will we shall be hanged for it !

FRANCIS. Thou shalt see a wolf changed into a lamb, Juniper.

BARTOL. Baa-a !

JUNIPER. There's a wise sheep, Father. He answers you !

[FRANCIS displays bread, meat, and wine, setting them on the rock before him.]

FRANCIS. Look you, Brother, is not this a fair feast ? Shall it not rejoice his eyes when he beholds it ?

[LUPO's eyes do not respond to the invitation.]

JUNIPER. Why should it, Father ? For by the robbery of honest men he can get all that and more.

FRANCIS. Brother Wolf is no fool, Juniper. Think you that it doth not grieve him to rob men ? For why should you seek to rob others, if you yourself be not in need ?

BROTHER WOLF

JUNIPER. Truly, Father, I have no wish to rob others !

FRANCIS. And dost thou think there is any man in the world more foolish than thou art ? Brother Wolf hath eyes like you and me : doth he not prefer light to darkness ? He hath ears : doth he not prefer greetings to reproaches ? He hath a heart, Brother : shall he not prefer kindness to misery. If he had food enough of his own, would he filch it from thee ?

JUNIPER. I know not, Father.

FRANCIS. Why, no ! For if thou art a robber, men fear thee, and seek not thy company : therefore, thou art lonely. Also, when they hunt thee, thou must run and hide : therefore, thou art homeless. And being homeless thou hast no family, nor friends to whom thou canst do service. And if thou have none of these, of what use to thee is the wealth thou takest from others ?

JUNIPER. I have none of these, Father : but neither have I wealth.

FRANCIS. Thou hast great wealth, Juniper : for thou hast charity. All that thou hast thou givest. Therefore give charity to Brother Wolf, and take pity on him, seeing that he is very sorry for himself.

[At this point the grinding of LUPO'S teeth becomes almost audible. His followers, too mentally dazed to follow the argument, take their cue from him, and do likewise.]

JUNIPER. Father, it's no use pretending, is it, Father ?

FRANCIS. No, Brother.

JUNIPER. May I say truly as I have a mind ?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCIS. I command you, my son.

JUNIPER. Father, you have a holy madness in you, and there's no curing you. I've prayed, Father—often I've prayed the Lord to give you back your senses. But He hasn't done it. He's only taken mine too. So here's the pair of us, with not enough sense left to catch a flea—let alone a robber. And if I wasn't so mad, Father, I'd think we were in danger now. For I've a feeling that I've only got to turn my head and I should see something.

FRANCIS. Brother Juniper, I will tell thee a story.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father?

FRANCIS. A young hawk fell from its nest, so hurt that it could not fly. When I took it to hand, it pecked and drew blood. But I did not kill it; it was helpless, so I brought it home with me. And its beak was very sharp.

JUNIPER. 'Twas a bright bird! It knew how to get round you, Father.

FRANCIS. Then I made it a nest, and brought food for it. It ate mice, Brother, and meat, and dead vermin; and when it could get nothing else, it ate me. But though it liked the taste of me, it had no love for me. So when its wing was healed and it could fly, forthwith it departed.

JUNIPER. A hawk is a vile bird, Father.

FRANCIS. A hawk is a hawk, Brother. When God made hawks He was not making men. So, when He made wolves, it was not men either: and never shall a wolf become a man. How, then, can a man become a wolf?

JUNIPER. But the hawk did ill, Father: for thou hadst saved his life.

BROTHER WOLF

FRANCIS. Even so hath God saved mine : yet do I sin against Him. Now when He, by love, showeth us how we be helpless, He showeth us also the helplessness of others. And since I loved Brother Hawk, that tore my flesh from me, shall I not also love Brother Wolf ?

[This is altogether beyond the comprehension of LUPO and his companions : but at least they can put the matter to the test. To that end LUPO gives a signal ; and the Robbers, cord in hand, draw close to their intended victims, while FRANCIS continues to instruct BROTHER JUNIPER.]

Aye, though he should put bonds on me, and draw out my teeth and my inside——

[JUNIPER catches sight of the Robbers that are about to fall on FRANCIS.]

JUNIPER. O Father ! Father !

FRANCIS. —and cut off my ears and tongue, and tear out my——

[At a signal from LUPO the Robbers fall on them and bind them. JUNIPER struggles instinctively, but without desperation. FRANCIS accepts the interruption as a step upon the road.]

FRANCIS. Is that you, Brother Wolf ?

LUPO. Aye ! My teeth are in thee now, Friar. Safe and bound !

FRANCIS. Thou hast begun well, Brother. Tarry awhile. See now, Juniper, here hath Brother Wolf got his teeth in me—in thee also. And, by the look of him, he is going to tear us to pieces. Yet shall we still love him. And by nothing that he may do can he prevent it.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

LUPO [*drawing his knife*]. Not if I slay thee ?
How then ?

JUNIPER. O Father, say a prayer for me !

[*But JUNIPER's captors cuff him to silence.*]

FRANCIS. Thou art very like a wolf, Brother.
But a wolf stands not on his hind legs as thou dost.

LUPO. Peace, thou fool !

FRANCIS. God give thee peace, also, Brother !

LUPO [*to JUNIPER*]. Thou fellow, is this man mad ?

JUNIPER. Aye, Brother ! He is more mad than
I am. For I have it only by fits, but he always.

FRANCIS. Thou hast a kind face, Brother. Tell
me thy true name ?

[*This affront to his face makes LUPO more
murderously inclined than ever.*]

JUNIPER [*cheerfully encouraged by the example of
FRANCIS*]. Bite him ! Bite him, Brother Wolf !
He will like thee the better for it !

LUPO. Cease, babbler ! Or I cut out thy tongue.

FRANCIS. Cut out mine first, Brother ; 'tis the
longer. And the more thou hast of it, the better
shall it pay thee !

LUPO. These be not sane men !

JUNIPER [*with conviction*]. We are not, Brother !

FRANCIS. Yet rather would I give thee my heart.
There is not much meat on my bones ; but my heart
thou shalt find tender.

CECCO. Messer Lupo, these men make mock of
thee.

LUPO. So be ! Patience, and we will hear them.
Sirrah, whence come you ?

FRANCIS. From down yonder—from Assisi.

LUPO. Wherefor ?

BROTHER WOLF

FRANCIS. To find thee, Brother.

LUPO. To what end ?

FRANCIS. To succour thee, for thou art in misery.

LUPO [*restraining himself*]. Go on, Friar.

FRANCIS. Now for thy body (which is a small thing) here is food and raiment.

GIUSEPPE. Have a care, Master ! He hath bewitched them.

FRANCIS. For thy soul (which is a great thing), alas, Brother, thy soul, thy soul is in jeopardy !

LUPO. And thy life ! [*He raises his knife.*]

FRANCIS. Brother Wolf, thou art a foul liver. Thou hast done great wickedness.

[*LUPO lowers his knife in astonishment.*]

Shame on thee, Brother, shame on thee !

CECCO. Master, shall this man live ?

LUPO. Peace, Cecco !

FRANCIS. Thou hast been cruel, and hast shed blood, thou hast robbed, thou hast burned, thou hast wasted ; and the riches which God gave thee, thou hast vilely cast away.

LUPO. Which God gave *me*, Friar ?

FRANCIS. Did He not give thee a heart, Brother ? —eyes, also, and a brain ? Hadst thou not compassion and kindness and understanding ? Was not thy strength given thee for the service of men ? And lo, now, in thy heart is hatred, and in thine eyes blindness ; and fire burns in thy brain, and blood is upon thy hands. Shall I not weep, therefore, for the misery wherein I find thee ?

LUPO. Thou art a brave Friar ! Dost thou not fear death ?

FRANCIS. For thee, Brother, greatly I fear it.

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Lo, the Pit : and in the Pit the flame leapeth : and in the flame the soul of him that I love perisheth ! For, lo, the Pit opens : and wherever thou goest the flame runneth after thee.

[LUPO and the Robbers start back horrified. Now it is under thy feet, now it catches thee by the hands, now by the throat, now by the heart !

ROBBERS. Messer Lupo, this man is a holy terror. Save us, save us !

FRANCIS. And lo, and lo, and lo ! . . .

[*There comes a deep rumbling, a great fall of rock and shale slides down the mountain. The mouth of the pass is filled with rubble and torn trees.*

ROBBERS. Oh ! Oh ! Oh ! The mountain is falling on us !

[*They run hither and thither and cower in hiding-places. JUNIPER, bound hand and foot, performs a sack-race dance across obstacles, and kneels before FRANCIS, very shaken and trembling.*

JUNIPER. O Father Francis, Father Francis, put your arms round me, or I shall go through !

FRANCIS. 'Tis only Brother Mountain shaking himself. Do not be afraid !

JUNIPER. I'd wish it were only some one else then, Father. Ah ! There ! He's at it again !

[*There comes another landslide. The Robbers howl despairingly, and run. LUPO stays fixed half-raised from the ground to which he has fallen. He stares at FRANCIS, to whom JUNIPER is now clinging with his bound hands.*

FRANCIS. It is over, Juniper.

BROTHER WOLF

JUNIPER. Ah! Then let us be quick away, Father, ere they be back on us. Look! If I undo thy bonds, then canst thou undo mine.

FRANCIS. Why should we run away, Juniper? Brother Wolf needs us.

JUNIPER. Sure and true! Looks as if all his teeth had dropped out, Father!

[For JUNIPER has read signs that do much to reassure him. LUPO comes forward and cuts their bonds.]

LUPO. Take thy curse from me, Father Friar, for I am not fit to die.

FRANCIS. I did not curse thee, Brother.

LUPO. Ah! Did not the Pit open?

FRANCIS. It was a little fall of earth, Brother. Mother Earth opened her hand; but she was kind and hath hurt nobody.

LUPO. Aye: but why came it then?

FRANCIS. I know not. Come, call thy men back to thee, for I would speak with them.

LUPO. They are gone. I am alone!

FRANCIS. Not alone, Brother.

LUPO. Thou man of wonder! Who art thou?

FRANCIS. I am the little fool of Assisi, the Poverello; hast thou not heard tell of him? Men laugh when they speak of me.

LUPO. From Assisi art thou?

FRANCIS. She was my mother; I was born there.

LUPO. She was mine—and she cast me out! In the place of justice she denied me; in my own house she robbed me; in the market she mocked me; in the street she stoned me; she cursed me, she hated me, she sought me that she might slay me. And now shall I let vengeance go?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCIS. Take thy vengeance, Brother, and do this. Be thou kind to her!

[He stretches out his arms in the form of the cross.]

LUPO. I?—kind! *[A dull amazement seizes him.]*

FRANCIS. O Brother, stand by my side, and look upon this city! Is she not fair?

[LUPO looks; there is still hatred in his eyes, his hand rests on the handle of his dagger.]

See her face, how it turns to thee in the light of the sun! Behold her towers like watchmen upon the walls, and her roofs like wings to cover her, and her windows like eyes. She hath ears also, and hands, and feet, Brother; and therewithal she hath a heart. And in her heart standeth the fear of thee. Down below are streets, and doors, and a market-place, and homes both for rich and poor. And these be full of the music of men's voices and the laughter of children, of tears also, and cries of sorrow and anger. But it is not sorrow or anger which giveth beauty to her face, or strength unto her towers. And the fear of thee that is in her heart bringeth no happiness.

Come, Brother, let thy heart go down with me into yonder city. Here is a house where a mother suckles her babe; and the child knoweth her, though he understandeth not. Here is a house where a young man bringeth his bride. He closeth the door, he turneth, he kisseth her. Sweet is the taste of love upon their lips. Here is a house where a man lies dying: he hath been strong, but now he is feeble and weak. Many things did he with his body, Brother; often he did ill, sometimes he did well. Now cometh death, and he under-

BROTHER WOLF

standeth not ; yet the good that he did comforteth him.

[LUPO *shows signs of compunction and understanding ; his hand drops from his dagger.*

FRANCIS. Yea, because he had love and not hatred within his heart, therefore he is not solitary.

[FRANCIS *lays his hand on LUPO'S breast.*

Ah, Brother, what is this that moveth *thy* heart, so that it leapeth ? Listen, I will tell thee. A man stood once and looked upon a city ; grievously had she sinned. And by his side stood the angel of God that was come to destroy it. So he said to the angel, ' If there be found in this city fifty righteous, wilt thou not spare it for fifty's sake ? ' And he answered, ' I will spare it for fifty.' Then he said, ' If there lack five of the fifty ? ' ' I will not destroy it for lack of five.' ' If there be forty ? ' ' I will not destroy it for lack of ten.' ' If there be thirty ? ' ' Nay.' ' If there be twenty ? ' The angel said, ' I will not destroy it for twenty's sake.'

[LUPO *begins slowly to unbuckle the belt of his dagger.*

And he said, ' Oh, let not my Lord be angry, and I will speak but this once. Peradventure there shall be ten found there ? ' And he said, ' I will not destroy it for ten's sake.'

[LUPO'S *belt and dagger fall to the ground.*

JUNIPER, *with eyes avid for signs, continues to cross himself and pray.*

Brother Wolf, thou art a sinner, as I also am a sinner. Wilt thou, having so many sins to thy charge, be less merciful than God that is without sin ?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

[LUPO buries his face in his hands. From a distance comes the chiming of bells.]

JUNIPER. It is the bells, Father!

FRANCIS. Yes, 'tis the bells of Assisi that thou hearest. They are ringing for thee. Come, and I will show thee twenty in that city, yea forty, yea fifty, yea an hundred that shall be glad, when thou hast taken from their hearts the fear they have of thee. . . . [*A pause.*] Brother Wolf.

[LUPO, with a sob, reaches out his hand to FRANCIS.]

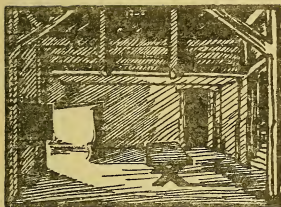
LUPO. I am blind, Father; lead me. . . . My life is in thy hands. I will go down with thee! Yes, I will go down.

JUNIPER [*rapt in ecstasy*]. O Father, I was a fool! For when I came here, I was afraid.

[*But FRANCIS, rapt likewise, listens and does not answer. The bells say everything.*]

CURTAIN

SISTER CLARE



In a bare stable-like interior BROTHER JUNIPER sits by a fire of glowing embers, his head drooping with sleep. To one side of the fire is a rough bench or settle, to the other a recessed corn-bin with half-doors, the upper one of which stands ajar. Opposite the fireplace, stairs lead up to a hayloft, the forepart of which is partly shut off from the

chamber below by a wooden partition that does not quite reach the roof. Beside the staircase is a door into another chamber; the outer door is at the back. From within comes BROTHER BERNARD, carrying a light, and stands for a moment watching BROTHER JUNIPER's jerky efforts to keep awake.

BERNARD. Why aren't you a-bed, Brother ?

JUNIPER. The Father said I was to wait up.

BERNARD. Oh ? Where is he ?

JUNIPER. Gone into the forest to fetch wood.

BERNARD. At this time of night ? What for ?

JUNIPER. Brother Fire sent him for it. I heard 'em talking. The Father says : ' Brother Fire, 'tis late : will you not go to sleep ? ' ' No,' says Brother Fire, and sticks out a tongue ; ' I 'll not.' ' What, you 're still wakeful ? ' says the Father. ' I am,' he says, and sticks out more tongue. So Brother Fire gets his way, and the Father 's gone to fetch wood for him.

BERNARD. Has he been gone long ?

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JUNIPER. If I've been to sleep without knowing it, he has, maybe. [*Then to the fire*] A bad end to you!—sending the Father out like that, on a cold night.

BERNARD. If the Father doesn't mind, why should you?

JUNIPER. If we waited minding till the Father did, we should never mind anything!

BERNARD. Very true, Brother. But why had you to stay up after all the others?

JUNIPER. He said we had a friend coming; and if he wasn't back, Brother Fire and I were to be here, to make things comfortable.

BERNARD [*smiling*]. So Brother Fire had a reason?

JUNIPER. Sure! I never thought of it. There! [*To the fire*] I forgive you, then! [*He puts on the last log.*] Oh! when Father Francis comes back, he'll find me sitting up in spirit, maybe; but in the body I shall be—[*a snore comes from the loft*—like the rest of us up there.

[*Falling to sleep, he jerks, and is awake again.*

BERNARD [*going stairwards*]. God give you good sleep, Brother Juniper.

JUNIPER. Aye; if God sends it me! But more times than not it seems to come from the Devil.

BERNARD. Why dost thou think so?

JUNIPER. Because when I'm asleep, I dream of things I should not.

BERNARD. So do we all. But on waking, finding they are not real, we forget them.

JUNIPER. Eh? Do we? I wish I did. Oh, women are the very mischief! I came here to be away from them. But Lord! when you go to sleep there's generally one waiting for you.

SISTER CLARE

BERNARD [*extenuatingly*]. Come, come, Brother!

JUNIPER. Aye; 'tis so! Here's Brother Elias been telling us things so holy and horrible, it made me afraid to listen to him. And to think we've God's word for it! Have ye heard, Brother, how one day, just through lying asleep on his side—or on his back, maybe—Adam got loose of a rib, and it turned into a woman?

BERNARD. Surely.

JUNIPER. So that's how sin came into the world,—all because of Adam sleeping.

BERNARD. God caused him to sleep, Brother.

JUNIPER. Did he so? Ah, but he didn't wake when God called him. 'Mother Eve,' Brother Elias told us her name was; and a good name too if it stands for evil. Oh, women are the root of all mischief. You know that yourself, Brother Bernard.

BERNARD. I have known it, Brother. God rest you to peace; and keep us all from temptation.

[He goes upstairs, and for a few moments you see his light over the partition. Presently the light goes out, and from above comes only the restful sound of slumber.]

JUNIPER. Temptation? Oh, I don't mind temptation, when it's what you call reasonable. But it's the unreasonableness of it that takes me where I'm weakest. Lord! if a temptation of that kind were to come here now, I couldn't answer for myself—nor for her either. [*To the fire*] Well, are you keeping awake, or must I? There's no reason for the two of us doing it. So long as I wait up, that's all he told me. . . . 'Wait up,' he says, 'wait up.' But when the weight of waiting gets on

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your eyes, it's like saying 'Up!' to a dead donkey, for all the heed they give to you. . . . Up! . . . Up! . . . Up!

[*And so, gently admonishing himself, he drops off to sleep, while from the loft above come the peaceful snores of the Brethren.*

[*Presently the door opens; cloaked and hooded a young girl enters. There, with all the makings of saint or sinner in the fresh beauty of her person, stands SISTER CLARE, as, from this day on, she is destined to be known. Advancing, she halts and looks at the sleeping JUNIPER.*

CLARE. Brother, may I come in, and be with you?

[*JUNIPER wakes with a start, turns, stares at the apparition, crosses himself with both hands, springs convulsively to his feet, and runs in haste to the corn-bin. He jumps in and closes the door.*

[*Unamused, and unperturbed, CLARE stands looking after him, then moves to the fire, and stretching out her hands, crouches to warm herself. But almost at once her hands fall from weariness. With a deep sigh of exhaustion she sinks down and lets her head fall back on the bench.*

[*BROTHER JUNIPER, after a while, peeps out, and not looking low enough believes her gone. Cautiously he puts forth a leg. In doing so, upsets a stool. SISTER CLARE opens her eyes and turns. JUNIPER whips back into hiding. Quietly, but resolutely, without any movement or raising of the voice, she begins to dig him out.*

CLARE. Brother . . . Brother . . . Brother.

[*Unable to resist, he puts out his head, and stays fixed by the stronger will.*

SISTER CLARE

CLARE. Come back, Brother ; I would speak with you.

JUNIPER [*very gradually emerging*]. What are ye doing here ?

CLARE. Resting.

JUNIPER. What are ye resting *here* for ?

CLARE. Because rest *is* here.

JUNIPER. Not for the like of you, though. God forbid !

CLARE. God hasn't forbidden it yet, Brother.

JUNIPER. What are ye calling me 'brother' for ? I'm no brother to a temptation like you ! O Lord ! where's Father Francis ?

CLARE. In the forest, gathering windfall.

JUNIPER. Oh ? ye knew that, did you ?—so thought to catch me alone. [*He starts crossing himself.*] Oh, God be merciful to me a sinner ! God be merciful to me a sinner ! God be merciful to me a——

CLARE. Once is enough, Brother. He hears you.

JUNIPER. When I've seen ye go, I'll believe it !

CLARE. If you tell me to go, I will go.

JUNIPER. Surely it's not reasonable of ye to say that. But if I don't tell you to go, it's not for wanting you to stay.

CLARE. Why should I not stay, Brother ?

JUNIPER. 'Brother' again ! What was it brought you ?

CLARE. A rough road ; a dark night ; and feet that, in God's keeping, failed not.

JUNIPER. O Lord ! am I waking, or am I sleeping ?

CLARE. Do me a service, Brother.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

JUNIPER [*badly scared*]. Service? What service?

CLARE. Here you have a roof, and I am homeless. Here you have warmth, and I am cold.

JUNIPER. You're cold, are you? I was thinking you were the other way, just!

CLARE. And very hungry.

JUNIPER. Hungry? Why ever didn't you say that before? Is it in God's name you tell me—that you are hungry?

CLARE. In God's name, Brother, I am hungry.

JUNIPER. The Lord bless it to you—and me too! There's no sin my feeding you if you be hungry. Tell me you're dying of hunger; for the more you're dying the better I feel about you. There . . . and there . . . and there. Now eat, so that I can believe you.

[*So saying, JUNIPER brings out bread and fruit and wine, which he puts on the stool and sets before her. She reaches for the bread, tries to break it, and falls back exhausted. At this sight, in sudden compassion, JUNIPER forgets his fear.*]

JUNIPER. The Lord be with us! Here goes! I'm in for it!

[*Kneeling beside her, he takes the wine-flask and puts it to her lips.*]

There! Open your mouth! Keep those eyes shut; and don't think it's me that's doing it. This is a dream we are having, the two of us. 'Adam, where art thou?' I'm here, Lord, I'm here! Don't let me oversleep myself, whatever I do!

[*JUNIPER starts feeding her. Swallowing with difficulty, she motions him to stop. He lays down the bread, and takes up a bunch of grapes.*]

SISTER CLARE

Nay, but you must eat something, Creature—Sister! And you can do it without opening those eyes. Shut 'em, I tell you! Now, there is one for you. . . . And there is another for you. . . . And there's another. . . . Now another . . . and now another . . . and another.

CLARE. Not so fast,—Brother.

[He waits a moment, watching till she has done swallowing.]

JUNIPER. Ah! It's doing ye good! So now we begin again. Here's one. . . . Here's two. . . . Here's three. . . . Holy Trinity, we're getting along well now! *[He continues feeding her.]*

CLARE. That's enough, Brother. Now all I need is rest.

[She opens her eyes, smiles at him, then with a confiding gesture surrenders herself to sleep under his very eyes. JUNIPER gets up and stands back, much embarrassed, and with a growing fear of what he has done.]

JUNIPER. Look at that, now! What'll I do with myself, now I've left off feeding her,—now that she isn't hungry any more? Now that she—O Lord! what have I been doing? Bring me back to my right senses! Let me wake, else I'm a lost soul! Here's a Temptation shining on me like a morning star! And I a poor sinner; and this the dead of night; and all the Brothers asleep, and Father Francis gone out to fetch wood; and the Devil seeing to it that he shan't come back again!

[A deep snore from above restores to him the sense of companionship.]

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Ah! there's a voice from heaven now to remind me. Yes, Brothers, yes; I was coming up to you.

[So saying, in great haste he mounts the stair, enters the sleeping chamber, and begins to rouse the Brethren.]

JUNIPER. Brother Bernard . . . Brother Bernard, wake for the love of God! Brother Giles! Brother Elias! Brother Angelo!

BERNARD. What is it, Brother?

JUNIPER. Get the others to wake! When we are all awake, I'll tell you.

ELIAS. We are awake, Brother.

JUNIPER. Are you sure you're awake? I wish I could be sure I was!

BERNARD. Tell us, Brother, what is the matter?

JUNIPER. Down below's a Temptation, Brother, waiting for all of you. The Lord save you from it—and me, and all of us! And there was I in peril of mortal sin, not knowing it! Are ye coming?

ELIAS. We are coming, Brother.

JUNIPER. Strike a light, then: and one of you hold me by the hand, for down there it's dark.

[A light is struck; together the Brothers descend the stair, JUNIPER leading them.]

Wait now! Cross yourselves: then I'll show it you. Look,—over there!

[Very devoutly the Brothers cross themselves, and though less scared than BROTHER JUNIPER would like them to be, awe is upon them when they see a woman, young and fair, stretched out asleep before the fire.]

ELIAS. How came this, Brother?

SISTER CLARE

JUNIPER. God knows. I was asleep. When I woke up she was there.

ELIAS. There—as now ?

JUNIPER. No ! God forbid, Brother Elias ! I was there then. No : she was there—standing.

[He indicates the exact spot.]

ELIAS. And the door open ?

JUNIPER. No : the door wasn't open, but my eyes were open.

GILES. What did you do, Brother ?

JUNIPER. Jumped like a flea that you can't catch. There 's where I went. *[Points to the corn-bin.]*

ELIAS. What happened then ?

JUNIPER. Oh ! a great thing happened. She didn't jump after me.

ELIAS. And then ?

[JUNIPER under the stern eye of BROTHER ELIAS becomes conscious of his guilt.]

JUNIPER. Then—if the Lord was merciful—I must have gone to sleep.

ELIAS. Nay ! How is that possible ?

JUNIPER. Because, when she called me, I went out and had dealings with her, which I shouldn't have done had I been in my right senses.

[At this there is great horror and consternation among the Brethren.]

ELIAS. O miserable man, into what sin hast thou fallen ?

JUNIPER. I know not, Brother. She said she was hungry, so I—I fed her ; said she was cold, so I poured wine into her ; said she 'd nowhere to go, so I let her stay. That 's all, Brother. And when she went to sleep, then I woke, and came up to

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fetch you. And here we all are ; and there she is ; and the Lord only knows—whether it 's true or not.

BERNARD. What shall we do, Brothers ?

GILES. Wait till the little Father returns.

ELIAS. We cannot wait here, Brother.

ANGELO. Let us so pray, Brothers, that we flee from Temptation.

ELIAS. Aye ! But here *is* Temptation.

GILES. I think the Temptation is asleep, and will not waken.

ELIAS. In sleep, Brother Giles, does the worm die ? In sleep is the fire quenched ?

JUNIPER. That 's what *I* said, Brother Bernard. When we 're asleep we are all worms.

ELIAS. Come then, let us go !

GILES [*making the sign of the cross over her*]. The Lord bless thee, little Sister, and give thee peace !

[*They go to the door, and opening it encounter*

FRANCIS, *who enters carrying wood.*

FRANCIS. Where are you going, Brothers ?

JUNIPER. We were going for a walk, Father, from that which is yonder.

[*He points to the sleeper.* FRANCIS *goes and looks at her.*

FRANCIS. Sweet Sister Charity, come at last ! . . . Wherefor away, Brothers ?

[*The Brothers stand looking a little ashamed of themselves.*

BERNARD. We were afraid, Father.

FRANCIS. Of what ?

ELIAS. Of temptation.

FRANCIS. Where, Brothers ?

BERNARD. In our own hearts, Father.

SISTER CLARE

FRANCIS. Come, then, let us sit down, that in our hearts we may find reason. Our little Sister is weary and will not waken.

JUNIPER. Father, was she the friend I was to wait for ?

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother.

JUNIPER. Oh, why didn't you tell me, Father, that it was a woman ?

FRANCIS. Why should I ? You could see that for yourself.

JUNIPER. When she came in at that door, I wanted to shoo her out again !

FRANCIS. And she ?

JUNIPER. She was kind ; she didn't go. She 'd go, she said, if I told her. But I didn't, Father.

FRANCIS. What did you do, Brother ?

JUNIPER. I fed her,—till she could eat no more. Then, when she was safe asleep, I called the others.

FRANCIS. Brother Juniper, come and let me lay my hands on thee.

[JUNIPER goes and kneels before him.]

FRANCIS. God made a great fool when He made thee, Juniper—for when He gave thee foolishness, He gave thee light also, and wisdom, and understanding.

JUNIPER. How did He that, Father ?

FRANCIS. Having love for thee.

JUNIPER. How will I be sure, Father ?

FRANCIS. Because those whom He loves love others. By this shall men know that ye are His disciples,—if ye love all, hating nothing that He hath made.

ANGELO. Though we hate nothing, Father, are we to fear nothing ?

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FRANCIS. What have ye to fear ?

BERNARD. Ourselves, Father.

FRANCIS. Aye. Therefore get rid of self. For that ye have become brethren—not to each other only, but to all. Look at our little Sister, and learn of her, how without any fear of us she lies sleeping !

ELIAS. Father, if you knew that she was coming, why did you go and leave us ?

FRANCIS. Because with Brother Juniper ye were safe.

JUNIPER. With me ? The Lord save us !

ANGELO. Why *has* she come, Father ?

FRANCIS. God sent her.

GILES. To be one of us, Father ?

FRANCIS. Surely ! If we have brothers, must we not have sisters as well ? Has not God for their service as good a use ? This roof was not of our building, nor is it ours ; yet here has room been found for us. Shall not some room be found for them, also—when we seek it for them ? Men are kind, Brothers, and the world has a great heart. Are we to be less kind than they ? Shall we say ‘ Go ’ to any that have heard the voice of Love say ‘ Come ’ ?

ELIAS. But what can she do, Father ?

FRANCIS. Bring others ; work as we do , give service ; love poverty ; find freedom ; have joy ! If no man provide them a roof, we will build it for them. If they lack food, we will supply it to them. If what we have seem little, by sharing we will make it greater. For, as a few loaves and fishes gave food to a multitude, so shall goodwill and service to our

SISTER CLARE

need bring abundance. While we work in the field, they will weave ; while we go forth into the world, they will keep house ; when we come to rags, they will clothe us again ; when we are sick, they will minister to us. When we are in doubt, they will give us counsel ; and when we knock at their door, they will open and bid us welcome.

ELIAS. But—what will the world say, Father ?

FRANCIS. I don't know, Brother. Must we wait till we know what the world will say ? What God says we know already. For had He not called her, she would not have come.

BERNARD. Who is she, Father ?

FRANCIS. A little Sister, named Clare.

[All stand silently looking at her. After a pause

FRANCIS speaks again.

Brothers, let us thank God !

[He kneels ; they do the same ; and when he begins the ' Ave ' they all join in.

ALL. Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum : benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus. Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. . . . Amen.

[They rise and stand watching, while FRANCIS puts wood on the fire, and covers SISTER CLARE with a cloak.

FRANCIS. Let us go to bed, Brothers, for it is late. You, Brother Fire, shall sit up with her ; and you, Sister Cloak, shall keep her warm. Good-night, little Sister ; sleep well !

JUNIPER. Father, you tempt me to think there's no such thing in the world as a temptation !

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FRANCIS. 'Tis a good thought, Brother : play on it, and some day it may come true.

JUNIPER. Oh : if only Father Adam could have thought that !

FRANCIS. What then, Brother ?

JUNIPER. Then the Tree wouldn't have tempted him.

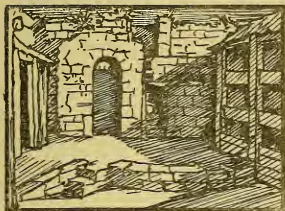
FRANCIS [*happy to be so instructed*]. No ! . . . no ! That is true, Brothers. Juniper is quite right.

GILES. Little Father, he always is !

[*And with this good thought in their hearts, one by one they steal quietly up to bed, FRANCIS going last.*]

CURTAIN

THE LEPERS



It is evening; and the bloom of twilight, which has begun to pervade the den-like enclosure, gives it almost a touch of beauty. But wherever the eye probes the obscurity, it finds squalor and wretchedness: only where the ruinous wall ends against the glow of an evening sky is there any glimpse of loveliness from the free world lying beyond. In

this well of misery the Lepers have their home. Dying men lie hunched in tomb-like recesses of the wall, from which occasionally emerge feebly gesticulatory hands or skull-like heads.

About the enclosure other figures, hooded for death, move listlessly or sit sunk in dejection. One gnaws a bone; another patches an old shoe; another, half-blind, sits apart from the rest biting his fists. From a cistern near the gate one dips and carries water in a cracked pitcher which leaks as he goes. As he passes, feeble hands reach out from the tombs, and faint voices cry for water; paying no heed he carries his pitcher to its destination elsewhere. Another leper sits at the top of a flight of stone steps let into the thickness of the wall, extending a pewter bowl to which, by the rattle of pebbles, he seeks to attract the attention of passers-by.

A crude thrumming of stringed instruments is heard from peasants passing along the road; and the leper's shrill whine for charity makes inaudible for a moment the sounds of pain rising from below.

1ST LEPER. Pity the poor lepers! Charity, kind Charity! For the love of God, pity, pity! kind Charity!

[The thrumming of the music goes on. 'Dirty

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lepers!' cries a voice. The beggar's whine changes into a splutter of rage.

Psha! Pest take you! God make a dirty leper of you!

[*Thrown from below, the pulp of an over-ripe fruit breaks against his face. Weak of spirit he utters a startled cry; fight goes out of him, he sits whimpering, till presently with his beggar's whine he starts again. The water-carrier, who at the sound of approaching feet has stopped expectant by the gate, now turns dejectedly away and resumes his task.*]

2ND LEPER. I thought, maybe, 'twas the Poverello coming.

OLD LEPER [*pausing from his shoe-mending*]. Ugh! He won't come again.

2ND LEPER. Why not?

OLD LEPER. Would you? Coming once was a wonder; twice would be a miracle. . . . That doesn't happen here.

2ND LEPER [*slowly, as if at a loss*]. He told me he would come. Why else was I to do this?

[*The 3RD LEPER comes by, stops, picks up the shoe-mending, looks at it derisively and throws it down.*]

OLD LEPER [*to 2ND LEPER*]. What are you doing?

2ND LEPER. Those vines: watering them. Make them grow, he said,—to be a shade. . . . It's been a hot day.

OLD LEPER. Said so, did he? I never saw 'em grow. Vines are they?

2ND LEPER. He said they 'd bear fruit.

THE LEPERS

OLD LEPER. And all be lepers before any one could eat 'em. . . . Grow!

[*Suddenly without motion the HALF-BLIND LEPER speaks.*

HALF-BLIND LEPER. Rot. . . . Rot, and die!

2ND LEPER [*returning to the cistern*]. Ayah! . . .
Ayah! . . . Ayah!

1ST LEPER. Pity, pity! kind Charity!

[2ND LEPER *crosses, his pitcher leaking as he goes.*

HALF-BLIND LEPER. Don't come fouling it over me!

2ND LEPER [*slowly, as one repeating a thing learned by rote*]. Your pardon—Brother!

OLD LEPER [*laughing*]. Heh! Heh! 'Brother!' That 's the new cure—for lepers! We are all catching it! Pah! He won't come again, I tell you. Well, blind black dog, how 's the mange? Are you a 'brother': eh?

HALF-BLIND LEPER. Curse of hell take you! Who 'd be brother to *you*?

OLD LEPER. Nobody: if he could help it. You can't. Curse of hell 's on both of us. There 's no getting away from that,—'Brother.'

1ST LEPER [*on wall*]. Oh look! look! They are bringing us another! A dirty leper! Ha! They've got him young, too. Aye; we've room yet. Put him in!

[*The news of a fresh arrival causes an uncanny stir in the community. They come flocking; some mount the wall and throw gibes at the newcomer and at those who are bringing him. Dying men thrust out their heads and watch expectant for the gate to open. Only the HALF-*

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BLIND LEPER *sits unmoved. Outside, chains are let down, a key turns, the door opens; with noose on neck, thrust forward at the end of a pole, the newcomer stumbles in. A leper's robe and cowl are thrown in after him: the door shuts to the sound of lock and chain.*

1ST LEPER. Pity, pity, pity! kind Charity!

[Those outside depart: the LEPER spits after them. The YOUNG LEPER stands motionless; all the others look at him.]

YOUNG LEPER. So. Now I'm dead. . . .
They've locked the gate. Ah!

HALF-BLIND LEPER. Stop your whining, puppy!

VOICES *[from the tombs]*. Water! Water!

[Indifferently the water-carrier puts down his pitcher where they can reach and help themselves. Greedy but half-timorous, relying on their numbers, the Lepers close in on the newcomer.]

OLD LEPER. What have you brought for us?

[The YOUNG LEPER looks at him, dazed, and makes no answer.]

You have to pay your footing to come here. Hold him, fellows! Now, we'll see.

[While the others keep grip of him, the OLD LEPER searches him. Though shrinking from their touch, he submits.]

OLD LEPER. Nothing! . . . Nothing! . . . Not a penny!

YOUNG LEPER. All I had—they took.

OLD LEPER. Give me that coat! You don't wear that here. Off with it! Here's a better.

[They pull off his coat, and put on him the leper's robe and cowl.]

Now you look honest. Who,—what are you?

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YOUNG LEPER. Nothing. What's a man like me ?

OLD LEPER. So you've got to it, eh ? Well, think of nothing. That's a good thought. Some day you'll get used to it.

1ST LEPER [*on wall*]. Charity, kind Charity ! Pity the poor lepers ! Pity the poor ! Pity the poor !

2ND LEPER [*watching the YOUNG LEPER curiously*]. Look ! What's he thinking of now ?

YOUNG LEPER. Last night I should have wed a bride.

LEPERS [*laughing*]. Ho ! Ho ! Ho !

[*The laugh goes joylessly on ; for this is a good joke, and one they can relish.*]

HALF-BLIND LEPER. A bride ? Where is she now ?

YOUNG LEPER. They found out. They took her away.

HALF-BLIND LEPER. So you let yours go ? . . . I killed mine.

OLD LEPER. Much good the killing did you. It's a cheap boast. They don't hang lepers when they do murder. Living's worse.

HALF-BLIND LEPER. I was no leper then.

3RD LEPER [*laughing*]. No : not till you met me !

[*The HALF-BLIND LEPER leaps up with a cry of rage, and makes for him. The 3RD LEPER retreats into the crowd.*]

3RD LEPER [*derisively*]. Clothes-peg !

OLD LEPER [*interposing*]. Keep your hands off him, ' Brother ' ! We've no brides here.

[*The HALF-BLIND LEPER turns stonily, and sits down again.*]

YOUNG LEPER. Who is that man ?

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3RD LEPER. Ask him! Nobody knows. Though 'twas I brought him.

YOUNG LEPER. Why? How?

3RD LEPER. As a dog brings in fleas: got him in my coat. You 'd like to hear it, eh?

OLD LEPER [*at his cobbling again*]. Aye, tell it, tell it! 'Tis a good tale; one that we like to hear.

2ND LEPER. And that he likes to tell.

3RD LEPER. Black dog likes to hear it, too. Don't you?

[*The HALF-BLIND LEPER sits motionless, making no sign.*]

3RD LEPER [*pointing maliciously*]. Watch! . . . Three years ago, God made me a leper. He 'd a reason for it, though I didn't know: not then. Turned out of my own house, having nowhere to go, I was coming here. There, on the road, I met him, running for his life. He says—(Watch!)—'Give me thy coat and the rest; and do thou take mine!' So he being the stronger, and his coat being the better, and given no choice, I let him take all. He asked no question: why should I?

YOUNG LEPER. What should he want thine for?

3RD LEPER. What for? Watch, and I'll tell you. Oh, he 'd a fine coat: but there was blood on it,—and men were out seeking him; so my coat seemed the safer. Ha! Two months later, my coat comes here with him in it. That's the tale. When he saw me again—here—he wanted to kill me: didn't you, 'Brother'? But the rest of us fell to and gave him such a drubbing, that now he dares not. Eh! 'Twas a real brother I was to him, when I gave him a leper's coat to scrape his back with!

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[*The Lepers laugh : the HALF-BLIND LEPER sits motionless ; only his hands are seen working with rage.*

OLD LEPER. God has been just to you, ' Brother.'

[*Under cover of the Lepers' laughter the unlocking of the gates has not been heard. FRANCIS enters accompanied by BROTHER LEO, and followed by JUNIPER carrying a sack. The YOUNG LEPER, who is the first to catch sight of them, runs and throws himself at the feet of FRANCIS.*

YOUNG LEPER. Father Poverello ! Father Poverello !

FRANCIS [*lifting him*]. So you have come safe, Brother ?

OLD LEPER [*astonished*]. What ? Again ?

2ND LEPER. Here is thy miracle.

3RD LEPER. Who are the others ?

YOUNG LEPER. I 'm dead, little Father, dead !

FRANCIS. Nay ; for here is Brother Leo hath a message for thee, from one thou lovest.

[*BROTHER LEO takes the YOUNG LEPER aside.*

OLD LEPER. So you 've come again, Poverello ?

FRANCIS. Why not again, Brother ?

OLD LEPER. I said you were no such fool. But here 's three of you.

FRANCIS. There are more of us in the world, Brother, than we know.

[*The 2ND LEPER takes up his pitcher and approaches FRANCIS. At once the voices from the tombs begin crying again—'Water! Water!'*

2ND LEPER. See, Father, I have been watering thy vines.

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FRANCIS. Come, then ! Over there thy brothers call for thee. Water them, too.

[They go together to give water to the sick and dying. Near the door stands JUNIPER, a little dazed and timorous. Having let down his sack, he stands waiting.]

3RD LEPER *[to JUNIPER]*. What's brought a thing like thee ?

JUNIPER. Sure ; I'm one of you.

3RD LEPER *[with appetite]*. What ? a leper ?

JUNIPER. The worst case ye ever saw. I've got sin all over me.

3RD LEPER *[pulling down his hood]*. Liar ! There's to your face ! *[Spits at him.]*

JUNIPER *[wiping his face with his sleeve]*. I meant in my inside. Is that the cure for it ?

OLD LEPER. Cure ? You can't cure corpses.

JUNIPER. Well ; that's something to know. It rests the mind.

OLD LEPER. Where have you come from ?

JUNIPER. The world. I was never in heaven yet.

OLD LEPER. What are you ? A preacher ?

JUNIPER. I a preacher ? God help any congregation that had to hear me ! I'm just what I look—a fool.

OLD LEPER. I'd guessed it. What's in your sack ?

JUNIPER. Father, they are asking what's in the sack.

FRANCIS. I am coming, Brother Juniper.

JUNIPER. I can tell you one thing that's in it :—a good weight. Father Francis wanted to carry it himself. But a donkey's back was better : that doesn't break.

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[*Suddenly he catches sight of the OLD LEPER'S shoe-mending.*

What have you got there? A shoe? You call that mending. Here; give it! You didn't guess me for a shoemaker, when you guessed me for a fool, did you? But I am.

[*And sitting down he sets to work. FRANCIS comes, takes the sack, and begins to open it.*

FRANCIS. Come, Brothers! See what we have brought you.

[*All the Lepers close round, except the HALF-BLIND LEPER who still sits apart, and the YOUNG LEPER who, his consultation with BROTHER LEO now over, follows him diffidently as he goes to give attendance to the sick lying in the tombs. Around the opening of the sack a babel of voices has risen; there is much pushing for place, and snatching from hand to hand.*

LEPERS. Ah! Poverello! Poverello! For me! Give it to me! No, that's mine! I say, mine!

FRANCIS. Patience, Brothers. Here is more. The sack is not empty.

3RD LEPER. Oh! Bread! White bread! I haven't seen white bread since—since . . . Where got you that, Poverello?

FRANCIS. It was given me: as much as I could carry. And when I want more I am to have it.

OLD LEPER. That is strange telling. For us?

FRANCIS. Yes: when I said, 'It is for the lepers,' how could they refuse me? No one had asked them before. *That is strange.*

OLD LEPER. Do you think men love lepers?

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FRANCIS. Do not lepers love men ?

3RD LEPER. We—we love men ? He ! He ! He !

FRANCIS. Why, surely : for you do not hate them.

HALF-BLIND LEPER. Not hate ? What have we left—but hate ? Are you going to take that ?

FRANCIS [*rising and going to him*]. Here is bread, Brother. Bread does not hate. Why should we ?

[*The HALF-BLIND LEPER takes the bread and puts it beside him. The 3RD LEPER sets an eye on it.*

FRANCIS [*to the others*]. So you thought I should not come ?

2ND LEPER. Some of us thought not, Father.

FRANCIS. Why ? Was any here that had not been kind to me ? or I not kind to him ? Ah, forgive me, Brother !

2ND LEPER. Kind ? There is no kindness here ! Where men lock in evil, they must needs lock out good.

FRANCIS. Indeed no, Brother ! None can lock out good. Good is everywhere.

OLD LEPER. Not here, little man.

FRANCIS. Yes ; in thy heart, Brother. In thy senses, also.

2ND LEPER. How in my senses ?

FRANCIS. Dost thou not see the sun shine ? Canst thou not taste the air ? Do not our ears tell us that the whole world is alive ? Does not the earth give forth scent after rain ? Is there no fragrance in flowers and herbs. Is not that a bird singing ? Man's senses are a palace wherein all these do minister. Aye, though this gate be locked, they enter to give you joy. Wheresoever the eye travels, yonder it finds greeting ; and where it goes

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there we go also. See, Brothers, there are birds ; and yonder are woods and mountains ; and there-under lies Assisi. Ye have not forgotten Assisi. And that which ye have in your hearts is yours still.

[*Covertly the 3RD LEPER puts out his hand to take the bread which the HALF-BLIND LEPER has left lying.*

HALF-BLIND LEPER [*striking at his hand furiously*]. Dirty thief !

3RD LEPER. The dirty thief hath not taken thy coat—nor thy leprosy !

HALF-BLIND LEPER [*hurling the bread furiously after him*]. Now thou hast touched,—take it !

3RD LEPER. Thy scabby touch is fouler than mine ! The ground rots under thy feet !

FRANCIS [*to 3RD LEPER*]. And the air was clean till thy tongue poisoned it. Contend no more, Brothers. Here is enough for all.

OLD LEPER. 'Twasn't more bread he wanted : 'twas that the other should be without. A good pair of haters, little Father. God made them, so there 's no mending them.

FRANCIS. I have mendings for one of them. [*To 3RD LEPER*] Look, Brother ; here are the leather and the tools, as I promised thee.

3RD LEPER. What was that for ?

FRANCIS. To make shoes.

3RD LEPER. Why should I make shoes now ?

FRANCIS. Didst thou not tell me thou wast a shoemaker ?

3RD LEPER. Not now. I was once.

FRANCIS. Thou hast hands still ; and thy brothers have feet. Wilt thou not make for them ?

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3RD LEPER. *I* make for these dirty lepers! I was put here to rot; not to make shoes.

FRANCIS. O Brothers, why will ye be solitary? For ye have all needs to which each one may minister. And they that serve each other become one.

3RD LEPER. Why should I serve any?

FRANCIS. Why should any serve you? There is no reason save love. Look, friends, what is that here stands, and here runs?

LEPERS. Water. . . . A spring.

FRANCIS [*holding his hands to the spout of the cistern*]. 'Tis a mere trickle, and it runs but slowly; yet my hands cannot contain it, because it runs to do you service. And is not that good for it?

2ND LEPER. Good? How, Master?

FRANCIS. If it stood still it would become foul; but running, it remains pure.

OLD LEPER. It's running to get away from us, Father!

FRANCIS. And yet is still with you; and having served you, so will it serve others. Whither is it bound now, think you?

2ND LEPER. To the valley—down yonder.

FRANCIS. Aye: and then?

2ND LEPER. To the river.

FRANCIS. And then?

2ND LEPER. Why, to the sea.

FRANCIS. And then?

2ND LEPER. Then nothing: then it hath lost itself.

FRANCIS. Aye, truly: for self is but a small thing. Yet still it liveth; for in the sea it hath its

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dwelling, therewith having become one. And of no part canst thou say, 'Here it is; or here it is not'—for it is everywhere. Farewell, Sister Water! Because thou goest to do service, God will make thee great.

[He opens his hands, and the water runs out of them.]

OLD LEPER. We don't understand, little Father.

FRANCIS. No, Brother, neither do I; for the ways of Love are too great that our minds should contain them. Yet we all have part; and cannot away from it.

[The HALF-BLIND LEPER has risen, and after standing for a while now comes slowly forward toward him.]

HALF-BLIND LEPER. So you are the Poverello, eh? the preacher?

FRANCIS. The Poverello, Brother. If thou lack poverty, share mine: for therein thou shalt find joy.

HALF-BLIND LEPER. How does a man share poverty?

FRANCIS. By love, and service, and obedience.

HALF-BLIND LEPER. 'Obedience'? Art thou ready to obey *me*?

FRANCIS. Very willingly, Brother.

HALF-BLIND LEPER. What I tell thee to do—thou wilt do it?

FRANCIS. If it may be done in charity.

HALF-BLIND LEPER. Does Charity wash feet?

2ND LEPER. Do not go too near, Poverello! He is foul—all over.

[The glow of day has gone. Shadows deepen;

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the light of the rising moon begins to prevail. In the obscurity FRANCIS stands struggling with his physical repulsion. The Lepers gather expectant and watch. LEO and JUNIPER are watching also.

FRANCIS [*stretching out his hands*]. O all ye, now pray that I may have charity !

HALF-BLIND LEPER [*with a harsh laugh*]. Ha ! I have had charity of thee ere now—'Brother.' Aye ; by this bloody hand !

FRANCIS [*startled*]. In God's name, who art thou ?

HALF-BLIND LEPER. One that was then thy better : now food for worms.

FRANCIS. Ah ! Brother ; show me thy face !

HALF-BLIND LEPER [*throwing back his hood*]. My face ! There is what 's left of it ! Dost know me ?

[FRANCIS searches, and finds.

FRANCIS. O God ! . . . Rudolfo !

RUDOLFO. That *was* my name. I had forgotten it.

[FRANCIS stands torn by emotion : curiously and with malice the half-blind eyes peer at him.

So ! . . . thou wilt not wash *my* feet—'Brother' ?

FRANCIS. Juniper, yonder is a bowl. Fill it for me.

JUNIPER. Father, Brother Leo has taken it.

FRANCIS. Let him bring it—quickly.

[*He turns to RUDOLFO.*

By your leave, Brother. Sit down, and let me uncover your feet.

RUDOLFO. So—you will !

[FRANCIS kneels and takes off the foot-wrappings.

OLD LEPER. Now with these sinful eyes do I see miracle !

[LEO, having filled the bowl at the cistern, stands

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waiting, his face rigid. FRANCIS rises and goes to him.

FRANCIS. Brother Leo, give me the bowl.

LEO. No, Father; I will not give it you.

FRANCIS. Alas, Brother! Dost thou so lack charity?

LEO. Pray—pray, little Father, that I fail not!

FRANCIS [*astonished*]. Doing what?

LEO. That which I have learned of thee.

FRANCIS. O Christ, sweet Maker of men!

[*LEO goes across to RUDOLFO, bearing the bowl.*

FRANCIS follows him.

LEO. By your leave, Brother.

RUDOLFO [*to FRANCIS*]. So you won't, eh?

FRANCIS. He, with more love, hath the better claim.

RUDOLFO. Who the devil is he?

LEO [*kneeling*]. Thy lover and servant, Brother.

RUDOLFO [*peering doubtfully*]. I know that voice! Show me thy face! Who art thou?

LEO [*letting down hood and tunic, in preparation for the foot-washing*]. I am Brother Leo,—that was Lucio.

[*RUDOLFO stares dreadfully at him, and cannot speak.*

FRANCIS [*drawing up his hood*]. Come, Juniper, come, let us go!

[*They go quickly to the door, and signal to be let out. While waiting they both kneel in worship. The door opens; they rise and go: the door closes again. And now in the darkening scene, crossed by a pale ray of moonlight, something strange is happening. The Lepers stand*

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spellbound : some of the sick have risen from their beds to watch ; the dying thrust out their heads.

RUDOLFO. Aye ! Thou dost well to hate, and feast thine eyes on him—that let thee live !

LEO. For my life, Brother, I thank thee. . . . And thou, also, art alive. . . . So we are together again.

[As he reaches for them, RUDOLFO draws back his feet.

RUDOLFO. Ah, mercy ! Do not touch me !

LEO. Thy pardon, Brother. Give thyself to love ; And let me wash thy feet !

[For a moment RUDOLFO sits rigid ; then with a loud cry he flings up his hands ; and, throwing back cowl and robe, sits naked to the waist, his body showing a dreadful whiteness in the dim light.

RUDOLFO. Ah ! not my feet,—
Not my feet only, but my hands and head !

LEO. Thy feet first, Brother.

OLD LEPER. What does it all mean ?
They frighten me !

[Fear, indeed, seems to be upon all of them. Only one of the dying Lepers speaks.

LEPER. Christ ! Gentle Christ !

[As LEO stoops to wash the feet of RUDOLFO the scene fades into darkness.

CURTAIN

SISTER GOLD



Scene: A hillside road leading up into forest. Dawn is beginning; one bird pipes, then another, till the air is loud with them. As the light increases one sees under the trees by the wayside the figure of FRANCIS, hooded, with hands folded in his sleeves, his head raised in ecstasy.

FRANCIS. Welcome, Sister Dawn!

[The sun rises.]

Welcome, Brother Sun!

[Up the hill comes BROTHER JUNIPER, grunting and out of breath, carrying a large basket full of bread.]

JUNIPER. O Lord! my poor back! O Lord! what big brother bellies to feed we do all have, to be sure! O Lord! what a——

[He sees FRANCIS and pulls up with a jerk.]
The Lord love you, Father, have you had a stroke?
Or is it Lot's Wife you're thinking yourself to be?
Or is it our Blessed Lord, and our Lady, and all the rest of 'em ye're seeing up there so plain? . . .
Father Francis, speak to me for the love of God!
. . . O Lord! the holy horrors: he's got 'em again! . . . Here's bread, Father Francis, just come from the oven, fresh and warm like our Lord

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Himself when He rose the third day. Aren't you wanting any yet? You haven't eaten——

[A GOAT-BOY has come upon the scene, and stands looking on, rather dazed and puzzled. At sight of him BROTHER JUNIPER's tone changes.

Well, who are you? What are you doing there, with those eyes?

GOAT-BOY. Holy Friar,—what's yon man a-doing? What for's he standing and staring like that?

JUNIPER. He's having a vision. Not for your eyes, nor mine.

GOAT-BOY. What for?

JUNIPER. Can't help himself. It's the way the spirit takes him. I'd have 'em myself sometimes, if they didn't hurt so. Now, Little-legs, you be off!

GOAT-BOY. What's it about? What's he seeing, now? O Father, look at his eyes!

JUNIPER. He's seeing Heaven, of course—Heaven: place the like of us won't see till sin's gone out of us, and all the flesh off our bones. But he's there already. Ah, you could stick a pin into him now, he wouldn't feel it. You could beat thorns into him, and he'd think 'twas only the skip of a flea.

GOAT-BOY. What for's all that gold lying at his feet, Father?

JUNIPER. Gold! What are you talking about, boy? Gold? [He goes and looks.] O Lord, keep safe my sinful eyes! Why, what's this? Shut your eyes, boy! Shut your eyes! This isn't for the like of you to see. . . . Father . . . Father Francis, did you know you'd got gold here under your feet? Father, did you know? . . . Holy Saints and sinners! here's enough gold to make a

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man miserable for life ! . . . Did the Devil send it to tempt you, Father ? Or was it our Lady wanting you to build her a fine new church ? What are we going to do with it, Father ?

GOAT-BOY. He 's coming to his senses again ! I saw one of his eyes give a blink. . . . Oh !

[FRANCIS *begins to draw his hands out of his sleeves.* *The BOY turns and runs.*

JUNIPER. Aye, that 's right ! Scoot away ! . . . Gold ! Father, what will I do with it ? Will I dig a hole in the ground and bury it till the day of joyful resurrection ? Or will I put it in the basket along with the bread ? Or will I leave it to the birds ? . . .

[FRANCIS *bends his head and looks at JUNIPER and his bread-basket.*

Yes, Father, it 's me that 's talking to you— Brother Juniper. I 've been down to the bake-house to fetch the bread.

FRANCIS. Welcome, Brother Bread.

JUNIPER. Father, where did all this gold come from ?

FRANCIS. You there, Juniper ? . . . Give me a mouthful of our dear brother.

JUNIPER. O Father, why do you always make us feel it 's murder to eat anything ? Well, there 's a piece out of his back. Bite him, Father !

[*He gives FRANCIS a large piece of bread.* *Breaking off a mouthful for himself, FRANCIS offers the rest to JUNIPER.*

JUNIPER [*taking it*]. And now teach me, Father, where you got all this gold from ?

FRANCIS. Brother Juniper, hark to that bird !

JUNIPER. Yes, Father ; he 's a wonderful bird—

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for his size. I noticed him, too : got a voice like a cricket. Dear Father, where did it come from ? . . . There, now you are sitting on it.

FRANCIS. Ah, yes . . . yes, I remember. . . . It was here.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father, I thought, maybe, you 'd remember it *was* here.

[*He tries for the gold ; but FRANCIS pays no attention.*]

FRANCIS. Last night I stood under that tree. . . . Sister Owl sat upon a branch. . . . Her voice was soft, praising God.

JUNIPER. Aye, Father. Did you see her catch a mouse ?

FRANCIS. And as she sat, three white feathers fell out of her breast.

JUNIPER. Holy Trinity, you don't say ! . . . Oh, here 's a story I 'm going to like.

FRANCIS. Then she went, and Sister Night was left alone.

JUNIPER. Yes, but the gold . . . what about the gold, Father ?

FRANCIS. That is what I 'm telling you. About midnight the moon set, and there came rain. Under the darkness the leaves dripped, and the earth drank, and a sweet savour came up from the ground . . . and all the world was asleep.

JUNIPER. And did the gold walk in its sleep, Father ?

FRANCIS. Sister Sleep is gentle, but she is strong. Her wings are silent as the white owl's ; but her voice more soft !

JUNIPER. But look, Father . . . the gold !

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FRANCIS. Now mark, Brother, how poverty afflicts poor men ! Night shed benediction from on high, slumber filled all the air. . . . Back into the sky had come the stars. . . . Overhead went the soft drip of leaves. . . .

JUNIPER. O Father, what have the stars and leaves got to do with it ?

FRANCIS. Then came three poor mortal men. Here at my feet they sat down, and in the darkness began to count their gold. First one way then another they counted it, and never would it come right. So, snatching it from hand to hand, they fell to blows ; and their voices grew loud. No longer could I hear the soft breath of night.

JUNIPER. O Father, were you not afraid ?

FRANCIS. And as they so wasted themselves in wrath, my heart was moved to pity ; and I said—

JUNIPER. Said ? O Lord ! were you mad, Father ? What was it possessed you to say anything ?

FRANCIS. I said, ' Not so loud, Brothers ! Do not wake Sister Night : she is asleep.'

JUNIPER. Lord help us ! you said that ? . . . What then ?

FRANCIS. Ere I had done speaking, they were gone ; and Sister Night had her rest.

JUNIPER. Eh ! but suppose they should come back for it ?

FRANCIS. Maybe they will, Brother ; for men are often foolish, not knowing when they have become rich.

JUNIPER. Gold is a great catch, Father. One time I, too, did like to look on it.

FRANCIS. You did well, Brother, for God gave her

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a goodly countenance. See how with her face she loves the sun. Gold is beautiful, Juniper; and when God made gold He loved her and saw that she was good. Then came man and spoiled her of her beauty. We must be sorry for Sister Gold, Brother, and pity when we see her in the dust.

JUNIPER. Oh look! Father, look! There under the wood are three men, with eyes watching us! They are coming back, they are coming back! O Father Francis, Father Francis, don't let them kill me! Oh, hide me, hide me safe, somewhere!

Enter the THREE ROBBERS. FRANCIS continues to eat bread.

1ST ROBBER. Morning, your Reverence!

FRANCIS. God bless you, Brother.

2ND ROBBER. Morning, your Worship!

FRANCIS. God keep you, fair friend.

3RD ROBBER. Master, you must get hence; this pitch is ours.

FRANCIS. Give me leave, friend, to stay awhile. For here I am guarding the wants of three honest men, whose faces I do not know.

1ST ROBBER. Say you so? 'Tis want brings us here now.

3RD ROBBER. There was gold here, Master, which was ours. And we be seeking it.

FRANCIS. Alas, Brothers, have you come back to be made poor?

1ST ROBBER. With that gold we shall be rich.

FRANCIS. Last night ye were not so. For then, ye lost peace, and friendship, and understanding. Also ye lost heart.

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3RD ROBBER. How so, Master ?

FRANCIS. And ran like sheep, having no friend but Fear ! See, then, Brothers, to what poverty gold brought you !

2ND ROBBER. Sir, we ran because it was dark night, and because an angel spoke. But we have not to fear angels by day.

FRANCIS. Alas, friend, then is your poverty yet greater ! For if ye fear not angels, ye fear not God ! And if ye fear not God, ye must needs fear the Devil,—which is the foulest fear any man can have !

3RD ROBBER. Devil nor man do I fear !

FRANCIS. Brother, neither do I ! . . . But very greatly do I fear God.

1ST ROBBER. Like enough we shall all fear God when we come to die.

FRANCIS. As when ye be come to a gulf which ye cannot cross. Think you, friend, that you could leap over that tree ?

1ST ROBBER. No, sir.

FRANCIS. God is much taller than that tree, Brother. With His little finger He covereth the whole world ; and touching, He maketh the smallest thing to seem great. Last night, hearing a poor worm speak, you thought it was an angel, and ran away !

3RD ROBBER. A worm ?

FRANCIS. I was that worm.

3RD ROBBER. Oh ho ! What have you done, then, with our gold ?

FRANCIS. Friend, I am sitting on it. . . . The worm has but to turn. There is your gold ! Oh come, Brothers, and look on Want ; for this is she !

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2ND ROBBER. Want? What does he mean by Want?

1ST ROBBER. Has he put a curse on it, think you?

3RD ROBBER. If he has, it must come off again! Here! Stop prating. We want our gold!

FRANCIS. Well, Brothers, since the Devil hath robbed you of all wealth, make good use of the poverty that he hath left. Fare you well.

2ND ROBBER. Stay, Master!

FRANCIS. Well, friend? . . . What is your will?

2ND ROBBER. Look you, Master: there be the gold, and here be we three men, and I the littlest of them. Left so—what chance of my share have I?

1ST ROBBER. You'll get your share, don't fear.

3RD ROBBER. As much as you are worth, and no more!

2ND ROBBER. No, I won't! And wasn't getting it last night, either!

3RD ROBBER. Ye parrot-hatch, hold your tongue!

2ND ROBBER. Share and share alike, it was to be!

3RD ROBBER. And *will* be!

2ND ROBBER. Then you stop and see it done, Master Friar! Stop and see it done!—Aye, he may be a fool, but he's honest. So I say, let him judge, and give each man his portion—fair.

3RD ROBBER. You'll be fair dead, when I've done with you!

1ST ROBBER [*nudging* 3RD ROBBER]. It's all right; let him do it! You divide for us, Friar.

FRANCIS. Very willingly, Brothers. Juniper, bring me the gold.

JUNIPER. Heigho! The Lord preserve us!

SISTER GOLD

[JUNIPER, *piling it on the pouch that it came in, brings the gold to FRANCIS.*

FRANCIS. Are you not hungry, Brothers ?

ROBBERS. Hungry ? We be hungry as ogres !

FRANCIS. Juniper, bring hither the basket. . . .
Come forth, Brother Bread ! . . . Look, is he not fair ? . . . Brother Bread, see you these three hungry men ? They wish to be at one with you. Shall it be ? . . . And lo, after his manner, Brother Bread speaketh and, like our Blessed Lord, he divideth himself among all, giving alike to each. . . . Let us thank God, Brothers, that He hath sent bread into the world, to die so that we may live.

[*He distributes the bread.*

FRANCIS. Now, for this bread, Brothers, if you had it not, and so were near death, would you not give all the gold in the world ?

1ST ROBBER. Surely we would, Master !

FRANCIS. See, then, how much more precious is bread than gold. . . . For no man can die for lack of gold. How came you, Brothers, by all this poverty ? Was it some man that did rob you ?

2ND ROBBER. *Rob us ?*

1ST ROBBER. *Rob us ?*

3RD ROBBER. No, we weren't robbed, Master.

2ND ROBBER. This gold, Master, we found.

1ST ROBBER. Buried in earth—put away out of use.

3RD ROBBER. So, was it not ours ?

FRANCIS. If Sister Earth gave it to you.

3RD ROBBER. Oh, she made no cry about it.

2ND ROBBER. 'Twas the other did that.

FRANCIS. What other ?

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2ND ROBBER. Him that first put it there ! 'Twas his coming back made the trouble.

1ST ROBBER. An old miser, Father. The gold was no good to him if he only went burying it !

3RD ROBBER. Well, Friar, let us get on to business.

1ST ROBBER. Right ! you divide for us.

2ND ROBBER. And all shares equal !

FRANCIS. I will divide it, then, into four portions.

ROBBERS. Four !

3RD ROBBER. Wants a share for himself, does he ?

1ST ROBBER. Means we 're to pay for the bread !

FRANCIS. Nay : Brother Bread seeks no payment.

3RD ROBBER. Then, why four ?

FRANCIS. Will you not give Sister Earth her share ? You thought the old man foolish ; but he was wise. It is right to bury the dead.

[This gives guilty consciences a shock.]

1ST ROBBER. He isn't *dead*, Master.

3RD ROBBER. I but gave him a knock or two, to make him lie quiet. And look you, Master, *he* wants to share equal [*pointing to 2ND ROBBER*]. But I say—how much was he worth ? If one digs while another only looks on—how then ? And if one does all the fighting and another only looks on—how then ? Is he to have same as me ?—Not likely !

2ND ROBBER. Hadn't some one to watch while you dug ? Hadn't some one to stop a man's mouth when he cried ' Murder ! ' Did you get your blamed finger bitten like me ? No fear !

FRANCIS. O Brothers, why have ye let Want come between you ? Ye have shared bread and are satisfied : but in sharing of this gold never can ye

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have so much of it but ye will seek more. . . . O Brothers, will ye not take pity on Sister Gold !

1ST ROBBER. Why take pity, Master ?

FRANCIS. For her sad plight, Brother.

3RD ROBBER. Good Lord ! here 's a lunatic for you. Why, what 's wrong with her ?

FRANCIS. See how she lies naked, and cold, and in captivity.

2ND ROBBER. In captivity, Master ?

FRANCIS. Surely, even as a fish, when you take it from the water which is its home ! Sister Gold loves to be under ground : likes quiet, darkness, and rest, with a good weight of earth to cover her. And of all that, man has deprived her. He has divided her into pieces, made a round thing of her, to toss, and spin, and dance ; and to be bartered for things that she has no use for, to be thrown away in lewd living, to be fought for, and have men's blood spilled over her fair body. . . . Are you not sorry for Sister Gold ?

3RD ROBBER [*accommodatingly*]. Master, you do make I to weep ! Never did I know what a melancholy thing gold was till now.

FRANCIS. Weep no more, friend ! Since now you can make her happy again.

1ST ROBBER. We ? How ?

FRANCIS. First you can cover her nakedness.

2ND ROBBER. How 's that done ?

FRANCIS. Put her back into Mother Pouch.

3RD ROBBER. Who 's she ?

FRANCIS [*holding up the bag*]. I do not know any other name for her ; but she has a large mouth, and long ears, and she is patient.

3RD ROBBER [*laughing*]. Friar, you be the biggest

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tom-fool I ever met. . . . Don't he make a chap laugh? I haven't laughed like that since my old mother died.

FRANCIS. You did well to be joyful then, friend. . . . Your mother went to God, did she not?

3RD ROBBER. So I trust, Father!

FRANCIS. But for that journey took no gold with her?

3RD ROBBER. Nay, Master, she did *not*!

1ST ROBBER. Oh! He got the old girl's stocking right enough!

FRANCIS. Yet she, without gold, made a better journey than you with gold: and came at last to a better inn.

3RD ROBBER. Maybe she did, Master.

FRANCIS. And for that end you buried her?

3RD ROBBER. Aye.

FRANCIS. So now, if you bury Sister Gold, she likewise will find her way to God, doubt not. For the City of God is made of pure gold, very precious; and it is still a-building. And this gold, given back to Him, will be to the making of those bright walls, and hereafter stand part of that gateway by which ye shall go in.

JUNIPER. O Father, if ye talk like that, I'll be getting a vision, Father! Poor sinner that I am!

FRANCIS. Then, when you see her, you will say, 'Hello! Sister Gold, how did you come here?' And she will answer, 'Brother Robber, *you* sent me.'

3RD ROBBER. Robber, you say? Nay, but you can't prove it! You can't prove it!

FRANCIS. No, friend: neither can Sister Gold. So you will say to her, 'Sister Gold, whom have I

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robbed ?' And if you have robbed no man, she will be dumb. So you will say further, 'There was a poor old miser burying gold in a lonely field ; and all his spirit was bowed and broken with the care of it. And even as he dug he did sweat, and started, and trembled, looking to right and to left and behind him, so much was he afraid.'

1ST ROBBER [*scared*]. Father ! How did you know that ?

FRANCIS. Sister Gold has told me : also Mother Pouch. For at night when he slept, Mother Pouch lay under his head, and he had grey hair.

3RD ROBBER. Oh, my God ! you do frighten me !

FRANCIS. So to rid him of his fear, first you hit him over his grey head, and then took from him his gold.

[*This miracle of clairvoyance is too much for them : panic seizes upon all.*]

ROBBERS [*sharing the confession between them*]. Yes, Father ! That 's true, Father ! We didn't find it, we took it, Father ! Oh, what a holy terror is this man for the discovering of our sins !

JUNIPER. So you 've found that out, have you ?

FRANCIS. And so you left him thinking of nothing but his head, which was far more precious to him than gold.

3RD ROBBER. Father ! must I be hanged for it ?

FRANCIS. No, friend. But having wrought in him so good a work, do not ask to be paid for it.

ROBBERS. We don't, Father, we don't ! We only ask to be let off this once, Father !

[*The ROBBERS all kneel at the feet of FRANCIS. He rises.*]

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCIS. O Brothers, look at the sun, for therein is life! This is the living gold which cometh down from heaven to give light to all. And lo, wherever it falleth upon earth, it worketh good; it lifteth up, and giveth strength, and maketh rich! Lo, upon thy face, also, Brother, lieth this gift, making thee comely to look upon! And since Brother Sun hath made thee fair of face, shall not thy soul also shine fair in the eyes of God?

JUNIPER. I'm going to see visions, Father! I'm not myself!

2ND ROBBER. And you'll not hang us, Master?

JUNIPER. Hang you? What for should he be hanging the like of you, wasting good rope?

ROBBERS. Oh, we be sinners, Father, we be sinners! We are very much afraid.

FRANCIS. Do not be! Here is Sister Gold.

[*He puts the bag of gold into the ROBBERS' hands.*]

1ST ROBBER. What are we to do with her? . . . Nay, take her back, Father. Truly she is not ours.

FRANCIS. Doubt not, if ye give Sister Gold Christian burial, she will pray for you.

2ND ROBBER. We bury her?

FRANCIS. See! Here is good ground where she may rest in peace.

1ST ROBBER. You mean—put her away, Father?

FRANCIS. Give her back to God, Brother.

3RD ROBBER. I think we be all fools! But if you say so, Father, it must be right.

FRANCIS. Which of you, then, will dig her grave?

1ST ROBBER. I'll do that, Father.

2ND ROBBER. No, I.

3RD ROBBER. Keep off! You leave it to me!

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[*He pulls out his sheath-knife and starts digging.*]

2ND ROBBER. Don't you want help ?

3RD ROBBER. Aye. You can look on.

[1ST and 2ND ROBBER help to shovel out the earth with their hands.]

FRANCIS. And to do this thing, not one of you is afraid ?

1ST ROBBER. No, Father ! What for should we be afraid ?

FRANCIS. When ye first went seeking it, ye feared every man !

2ND ROBBER. Aye, that is true.

JUNIPER. O Father, I'm having visions, Father ! I can see our Lord riding into holy Jerusalem sitting on a milk-white ass, and three big blind donkeys following Him, and me at the tail end of 'em ; and never the stroke of a stick wanted to tell 'em where they are to go ! Oh, it's a fair vision I'm having, Father, and I see it all !

FRANCIS. Have your vision, Brother. Yet shall you see it better if you talk less.

3RD ROBBER. Will that do, Father ?

FRANCIS. Yea, truly ! See how willingly Sister Earth made room in her breast ! Come, Brothers, there is Sister Gold. . . . She is in your hands ; be kind to her.

[*The ROBBERS, with contrite humility, lay the bag of gold in the ground.*]

Now doth she enter into rest. Now is she at peace. Now is her face set toward the City of God. . . . Doubt not though ye give this poor mortal body to ground that ye shall see it hereafter arise in glory. . . . [*The ROBBERS rise from their task.*] So now, Brothers, thank God that hath made you rich.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

1ST ROBBER. This be a great wonder, Father !

JUNIPER. Aye, so ! And all the Brothers up there waiting breakfast, and wondering what has become of it. Shall I go, Father ?

FRANCIS. Tarry awhile. Here comes more Hunger.

*Enter OLD MISER, very feeble and tottering,
with bandaged head.*

MISER. O Father Friar, help, help ! Save me !

FRANCIS. Art thou in fear, Brother ?

MISER. Aye ! . . . Yes, I—I be mortally afraid.

FRANCIS. Wherefor ? Art thou in sin ?

MISER. In sin ? Nay, most foully have I been sinned against. Oh, the things that I have suffered this night ! . . . My gold, my gold, all my gold is gone.

FRANCIS. And thy wits also, Brother !

MISER. 'Twere no great wonder ; my skull being so drained of blood ! . . . Ten thieves set upon me, Father ; they beat me till I was black and blue ; they knocked out my senses. Then they took all my gold. . . . Oh, my gold !

FRANCIS. But they left thee thy life, Brother.

MISER. What use is life when one has lost all ?

FRANCIS. Friend, I am sorry for thee. [*To the ROBBERS*] We are all sorry, are we not ?

1ST ROBBER. We are, indeed, Father !

2ND ROBBER. Sorry isn't the word !

3RD ROBBER. My heart bleeds for him !

[With these compunctious but face-saving remarks, the ROBBERS do their best to meet an awkward situation.]

SISTER GOLD

JUNIPER. Ah, you're a sad sight ! Here's a bit of bread for you.

[The old man takes it mechanically, but his attention is elsewhere. JUNIPER approaches the embarrassed ROBBERS.]

And here's more bread for you three donkeys, for ye look hungry again ! . . . *[Aside]* You'd better be off !

[But the ROBBERS, awkward squad though they be, are ready to face fire; and will take their marching orders only when FRANCIS gives the word.]

MISER. Who be these ?

[The ROBBERS break bread, and pause each with a mouthful in hand.]

FRANCIS. Grave-diggers.

MISER. Why, then, they should be honest men.

FRANCIS. Do they not look honest ?

[The ROBBERS precipitately fill their mouths with bread, the munching of which helps them to look innocent.]

MISER. I say nothing against it, Father, they being with you. . . . But oh, the thieves, the thick thieves there be in the world ! And all my gold gone !

JUNIPER. Ten thieves, did you say ?

MISER. Aye, they had the weight of ten when they all fell on me. But there in the dark, less or more, how could one tell ?

FRANCIS. Would you know them again, Brother ?

[The ROBBERS again pause with mouthfuls of bread in their hands.]

MISER *[vengefully]*. Aye ! God helping me, I would ! I bit the finger of one : him I would know !

[2ND ROBBER puts his hand behind his back.]

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One I heard speak ; his voice I should know !

[*The ROBBERS again fill their mouths with bread.*
And one I should know by his smell !

[*The ROBBERS, with their chances of escape thus diminished, turn supplicating eyes to FRANCIS.*

FRANCIS. Your head is bleeding, Brother.

MISER. Aye, very like ! Though I have not much blood left.

FRANCIS [*to 3RD ROBBER*]. Bind up his wound, Brother. . . . Be careful how you handle it !

[*The 3RD ROBBER goes braced to his task. For lack of a bandage he pulls up the tail of his shirt and tears it off.*

MISER. Ah, if I could but catch the man that did this ! O God, that I might find him !

[*He begins nervously to break and crumble the bread he has in his hand.*

FRANCIS. You wish to pardon him, Brother ?

MISER. I pardon him ? . . . I would put out his eyes ! I would flay the flesh off his bones ! I would hang him up by the heels till his head did rot off.

[*He utters a cry, for at that moment the bandaging causes him pain.*

3RD ROBBER [*meekly*]. Your pardon, Brother.

FRANCIS. Would you do so to all ten ?

MISER. Aye : every mother's son of 'em !

FRANCIS. Peradventure there were found, friend, three of the ten that had repented. Wouldst thou not have mercy upon three ?

MISER. Why should I have mercy on them that took all my gold ? Why should I . . . ?

[*The 3RD ROBBER being short of bandage material, and failing to make it enough, is look-*

SISTER GOLD

ing about for more. The other two ROBBERS pull up the tails of their shirts and offer what is requisite.

2ND ROBBER. Have a bit of bread, Gaffer, you'll feel better after it. *[Offers it.*

MISER [*feebly*]. Shall I? . . . I don't know. I . . . Oh, how shall I live, having lost all my gold!

1ST ROBBER. Bread is worth more than gold, Master.

MISER. What does that gabbling fool say?

FRANCIS. He speaks as he knows, Brother.

1ST ROBBER. Aye, look you! for last night, Gaffer, I had as much gold under my hand as ever you had. But I gave it all up—for a bit of bread.

MISER. The more fool you!

FRANCIS. It was living bread, Brother. And having that, he shall not hunger again. . . . Go in peace, Brothers: for now is our Sister at rest since you have given her good burial.

ROBBERS. God bless you, Father!

FRANCIS. Brothers, God bless and keep you!

3RD ROBBER [*to JUNIPER*]. God keep you, Brother! [*To the MISER*] And you, Master, from those ten robbers.

[Exeunt the THREE ROBBERS.

JUNIPER. O Father, they be three great donkeys; but our Lord hath put His mark upon their backs!

MISER. Burial, you say? Whom have they been burying?

FRANCIS. One that was dead, men having so mis-handled her. Her name was Sister Gold.

MISER. Gold? . . . Gold?

FRANCIS. Even so, Brother.

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MISER. Whose gold ?

FRANCIS. God's, Brother. To whom else can gold belong ?

MISER. Where got they that gold ? Where got they that gold ?

FRANCIS. In a field, Brother. There was an old man burying it, because he had no use for it, knowing that it was dead. Then came others who knew it not ; so, thinking she was alive, they took her from him that buried her, and brought her hither. But seeing her in the light of day they found she was dead.

MISER. What have they done with that gold ?

FRANCIS. Given her back to God.

MISER. Ah ! you mean that the Church has taken it ! She had no right to it. That gold was mine ! O you friars and priests, you are all thieves like the rest of them ! Give it back, give it back to me, I say !

FRANCIS. I have not taken your gold, Brother.

MISER. Where is it, then ?

FRANCIS. She is in peace, lying at rest in Mother Earth. Seek not to disturb her again. Did not you yourself put her there ?

[*The OLD MISER is up against a hard problem.*

FRANCIS knows where the gold is, and may not choose to divulge its whereabouts. It comes then to this : How is he to get such standing with the Friar that the knowledge may become his ? With mind busily catching at straws, he starts muttering to himself.

MISER. My gold ! . . . Yes, yes, my gold. . . . Yes, I did put it there ; I . . . Yes, yes. I . . .

SISTER GOLD

Father . . . you say that it is safe . . . that gold,
Father ?

FRANCIS. It is safe, Brother.

MISER. Where does it lie ?

FRANCIS. In God's hands.

MISER. Yes . . . but I . . .

[*He glances round suspiciously.*]

FRANCIS. Art thou still afraid, Brother ?

MISER. Of what ?

FRANCIS. Of robbers.

MISER. Why should I fear robbers, now that they
have taken all my gold ?

FRANCIS. Very true. Therefore thou art at
peace with them.

MISER. I ?

FRANCIS. And she, that was thy sorrow, is at
peace also.

MISER. She ?

FRANCIS. The robbers had pity on Sister Gold . . .
and wilt thou be less kind to her than they ? Didst
thou not love Sister Gold ?

MISER. Yes, Father, yes ! Show me where she
lies now ?

FRANCIS. She was cold, and naked, and in bond-
age, and the lust of men's eyes had shamed her. So
in the fear and love of God they buried her. And
now she is at peace.

MISER. Father, you must be a marvellous holy
man to talk like that ! . . . At peace, you say ?
Well, I . . . God forbid that I should seek to take
away her peace ! . . . Let her rest, let her rest, as
you say, Father ! . . . Yet I would like to know
where you have buried her, so that I may come now

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

and then and say a prayer upon her grave. . . .
You wouldn't tell me, I suppose . . . you wouldn't
tell me just where she——?

FRANCIS. She lies here, Brother; under this tree.

JUNIPER. Ah! now you've done it, Father!

MISER. Here!

FRANCIS. Even so, Brother.

MISER. What? All here? O God! can it be
true? Yes! for the ground's been dug. I . . .
Well, well, Father, God give her peace! . . . And
you too, Father, and you, Brother. . . . Yes, let
her lie. Will you give your blessing, Father, to
a poor man?

FRANCIS. The Lord bless you and keep you,
Brother.

The Lord make His face to shine upon you.

The Lord lift up the light of His countenance
upon you, and give you peace.

JUNIPER. Are you going to say 'Amen'?

MISER. Aye! . . . Amen. . . .

*[Fixing his eyes on the spot, he pauses for a
moment, then goes.]*

JUNIPER. Father, did you believe that old man
when he so readily forswore his gold?

FRANCIS. No, Brother; but he believes me.

JUNIPER. That his gold is buried here? Why, so
I think! And as soon as your back is turned,
Father——

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother. Hark, there is that bird
again. . . . Is it not wonderful, Brother, how men
love fear; and rather than be without it, will die?

[FRANCIS goes and stands under the tree.]
O thou little Brother, that brimmet with full heart,

SISTER GOLD

and having naught, possesseth all, surely thou dost well to sing ! for thou hast life without labour, and beauty without burden, and riches without care. When thou wakest, lo, it is dawn ; and when thou comest to sleep it is eve. And when thy two wings lie folded about thy heart, lo, there is rest. Therefore sing, Brother, having this great wealth, that when thou singest thou givest thy riches to all. . . . Come, let us go, Brother Juniper. You lead the way. . . . Farewell, little Brother ! Have no fear !

[JUNIPER *shoulders his basket and mounts the path leading to the friary.* FRANCIS *passes into the wood.*

Re-enter the OLD MISER, carrying a stake of wood. He starts and trembles, looking from right to left. He comes to the spot where the gold lies buried.

MISER. . . . Father Fool, Father Fool, did you think to keep my gold from me ? [*He starts digging.*] No, you don't . . . no, no, you don't ! You don't ! You don't ! Ah, my gold, my beautiful gold, come to me ! Where art thou ? . . .

[*He reaches into the hole and draws out the bag of gold.* FRANCIS, *reappearing, stands behind him.*

Ah, there thou art ! My sweet, my sweet ! Welcome back to me again !

[*He hugs the gold to his breast.*

FRANCIS. Welcome, Sister Fear !

MISER. Ah !

[*Covering the bag under his coat, he starts back in an extremity of terror, and crouches trembling,*

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

expecting death. FRANCIS stands perfectly still behind him. Slowly he turns and looks.

Father! . . . Father . . . I didn't mean . . . to do it, Father . . .

[FRANCIS stands, not regarding him, saying nothing, listening to the bird. Presently the old man drops the bag back into the hole, and begins to shovel in the earth with his hands; his breast is shaken with dry sobs. He works slowly at first, then with more and more feverish haste till the task is done.

Father, give me your blessing; . . . for I have sinned!

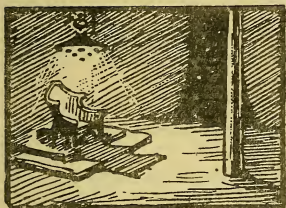
FRANCIS. The Lord bless you and keep you, Brother.

The Lord make His face to shine upon you.

The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you, and give you peace.

[FRANCIS makes the sign of the Cross; then turns and goes up the hill. The old man totters to his feet, the sun shines on his face. The look of fear goes out of his eyes. From the friary comes the sound of the 'Angelus.' The old man crosses himself three times, kneels down and prays. You hear the first words, 'Ave Maria'; after that you only see the quick muttering of his lips. At 'Sancta Maria' he becomes audible again, but the rest is silence. When his lips cease to move the CURTAIN falls.

BROTHER SUN



Scene: The camp of the Saracens before Damietta, looking out eastward over the sands and lagoons.

In a large circular tent, gorgeously hung with arras of gold and scarlet, the SOLDAN sits enthroned on a high dais. Upon the steps to right and left, in order of rank, stand his Emirs and Councillors.

Before the entrance are armed

Soldiers and around the tent-walls Nubian Slaves and Arab Servants. Against the pole of the tent stands the SOLDAN'S Sword-bearer. The door is wide open, revealing the red glare of an Eastern day now nearing its end. Before the SOLDAN stands the CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD.

SOLDAN. Two men, you say, Captain? What like are they?

CAPTAIN. Beggars, Soldan, to look upon: ragged, bare-foot, and very weary.

SOLDAN. Whence come they?

CAPTAIN. From the camp of the Infidel—so they say.

SOLDAN. Had they arms?

CAPTAIN. No, Soldan.

SOLDAN. How came they in?

CAPTAIN. They were in our midst before we knew. Because the hand of Heaven seemed on them, our outposts had let them pass.

SOLDAN. The hand of Heaven?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

CAPTAIN. As being of those afflicted ones on whom Allah bids us have pity, Soldan.

SOLDAN. Madmen ?

CAPTAIN. Such I took them to be when first I saw them. But now, having questioned them, I am in doubt.

SOLDAN. Wherefor ?

CAPTAIN. Because, though their speech is sane, what they do is contrary.

SOLDAN. Aye ? How ?

CAPTAIN. They seem to make mock of us, Soldan ; and of the peril they stand in. When I warned them of death they did but smile ; when we used them roughly, they seemed grateful to us ; when we put chains on them they laughed and sang. Some say they be magicians, Soldan, and would have no dealings with them.

SOLDAN. Said they for what cause they came ?

CAPTAIN. To bring thee peace, Soldan.

SOLDAN. Peace ? Are they ambassadors ?

CAPTAIN. I know not, Soldan. Their message, they said, was for thee.

SOLDAN. Well, I will see for myself. Bring them in.

[*The CAPTAIN goes, followed by his Guard. The Emirs and Councillors show perturbation.*]

COUNCILLOR. O Soldan, is it forgiven if now we speak ?

SOLDAN. Speak, any who will.

COUNCILLOR. Have a care, dread King ! For though these men be not armed, they may have power of evil.

SOLDAN. Very like. Has not the Most High commanded us to fight evil ?

BROTHER SUN

COUNCILLOR. But these having no arms, Soldan, how canst thou fight them ?

SOLDAN. How can they fight us ?

COUNCILLOR. By evil enchantments, Soldan.

SOLDAN. And have we none wiser that can withstand them ? See to it. To your charge I commit me. Do ye your office, while I do mine.

COUNCILLOR. Commander of the Faithful, it shall be done.

[One of the Councillors, taking from his finger a ring, threads it upon a red cord ; the cord is drawn across the front of the dais, the ring suspended upon it during the scene that follows. A sound of chains is heard, and the tread of the Guard approaching. The voice of the CAPTAIN outside cries ' Halt ! ' The CAPTAIN enters.]

CAPTAIN. The prisoners are here, Soldan.

SOLDAN. Bring them.

[FRANCIS and BROTHER ILLUMINATO are brought in, and kept closely guarded at a safe and respectful distance from the SOLDAN'S person.]

Who art thou ?

FRANCIS. Thy lover and servant, Soldan.

SOLDAN. Who is this with thee ?

FRANCIS. He also is thy lover and servant, Soldan.

SOLDAN. Whence come ye ?

FRANCIS. From the Camp of thine enemy.

SOLDAN. Of whom, also, ye are ?

FRANCIS. We are of the same race, Soldan.

SOLDAN. Wherefor, then, come ye here ?

FRANCIS. To set thee free, O King.

SOLDAN. From whom ?

FRANCIS. From fear.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

SOLDAN. Fear ? I fear no man.

FRANCIS. Thou bearest arms, Soldan. He that is without fear bears none.

SOLDAN. Why then, in the Camp of the Christians also there is fear !

FRANCIS. Aye. Very greatly they fear thee, Soldan.

SOLDAN. They do well.

FRANCIS. They would do better if they did not fear thee.

SOLDAN. Dost not thou fear me ?

FRANCIS. No, Soldan.

[This causes no little stir among the Emirs and Councillors. The Swordsman's hand instinctively takes a better grip on his weapon, as with sidelong glance he waits the word of command.]

SOLDAN. Come ! What art thou here for ?

FRANCIS. To take thy chains from thee.

SOLDAN. I have no chains.

FRANCIS. O Soldan, are not these thy chains ?

SOLDAN [*grimly amused*]. Aye : but *thou* wearest them.

FRANCIS. He that putteth chains upon others is chained also.

[A murmur of angry astonishment comes from the assembled Councillors.]

AN EMIR. When is this man to die, Soldan ?

SOLDAN. Not at thy bidding, Emir. At mine.

COUNCILLORS [*in a fierce whisper of impatience*].
Aye !

SOLDAN. Come hither !

[The Guard bring FRANCIS to the foot of the dais.]

BROTHER SUN

I said not 'bring him hither.' Stand back!

[*The Guard fall back. The SOLDAN comes down from his throne, takes hold of the fetters, and weighs them in his hand.*

So these are *my* chains that thou wearest?

FRANCIS. Very willingly, Soldan.

SOLDAN [*sarcastically*]. I thank thee. . . . Think-est thou that I am in fear of thee?

[FRANCIS looks from SOLDAN to suspended ring and back again; and there is a suspicion of amusement in his tone as he answers.

FRANCIS. I know not, Soldan.

[*The SOLDAN snaps the thread. The ring falls.*

FRANCIS stoops, picks up the ring, and hands it to the SOLDAN.

COUNCILLOR. Beware, Soldan!

SOLDAN [*returning to his place*]. Take from him his chains: his also.

[*The chains upon FRANCIS and BROTHER ILLUMINATO are struck off.*

Stand away! Do not hold them! . . . Prisoner, . . . where are my chains now?

FRANCIS. Upon thy heart, Soldan; yea, and upon thy soul. To us thou hast been gentle and gracious; but not unto thyself. For though thou givest freedom to others, to thine own self thou art yet a prisoner.

[*The SOLDAN lays by the talisman he has been holding.*

SOLDAN. And from this prison wherein I am,—who shall set me free?

FRANCIS. Thou Prince of Majesty, holder of power and glory, give thyself into my hand, and I will lead thee.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

SOLDAN. Whither ?

FRANCIS. To thy Lord and my Lord which died for us.

SOLDAN. *My* Lord, thou sayest !

FRANCIS. Aye ; for though thou see it not, His Light is already in thee. This is the Light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world.

SOLDAN. And thou, also, art a Christian ?

FRANCIS. God knows I would I were worthy to be called so.

SOLDAN. Is the way, then, so hard ?

FRANCIS. Nay ; but most sweet, and easy, and comforting. And yet I stray !

[There is a pause : outside the light of day begins to fail.]

SOLDAN. How wouldst thou make me—a Christian ?

FRANCIS. I would show thee Christ, Soldan. Or, if by that name thou know Him not, then by His other name which is Love, wherein also dwell Joy and Peace. This have I come—to show.

SOLDAN. Yea : speak !

FRANCIS. Oh, hearken, for this is wonder !

Light looked down and beheld Darkness.

'Thither will I go,' said Light.

Peace looked down and beheld war.

'Thither will I go,' said Peace.

Love looked down and beheld Hatred.

'Thither will I go,' said Love.

So came Light, and shone.

So came Peace, and gave rest.

So came Love, and brought Life.

And the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us.

BROTHER SUN

Then was He betrayed, and given up into the hands of sinful men : Light to the darkness of Death, Peace unto the pains of Hell, Love to the separation of the grave. And because the power of Evil prevailed not against Him, these henceforth He holdeth, and they are His. So out of Darkness He wrought Light, and Peace out of the pains of Hell, and out of the prison-house of Death He bringeth us Life Eternal.

SOLDAN. Knowest thou this of thyself ? or did others tell it thee ?

FRANCIS. O Soldan, were it not true, wouldst thou not already have slain me ?

SOLDAN. I may slay thee yet, prisoner : for I have not let thee go.

FRANCIS. What I have spoken thou hast heard. How wilt thou fear me less when I am dead ?

SOLDAN. *I . . . fear thee ?*

FRANCIS. When I am dead, Soldan, thou wilt remember me.

SOLDAN. Go on, prisoner. Say what thou hast to say, while yet there is time.

[It begins to get dark.]

FRANCIS. Soldan, as I came hither, there met me in the way a great army of ants,—many thousands of them, all hither and thither running without rest. What was their toil, whose word they obeyed, I could not tell ; but they were all very full of it—in a world of their own. So I stood and looked at them ; but though very plainly I saw them, they saw not me. I was nothing to them. Yet, had I so wished, I could have killed every one of them.

SOLDAN. Wherefor dost thou tell me this ?

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FRANCIS. Because thou art a great king, Soldan, and I am in thy power ; and which of us is to die first—thou or I—we know not. But God, Whom we see not, knows.

SOLDAN. Which is to die first ?

FRANCIS. Aye.

SOLDAN. Knowest *thou* not ?

FRANCIS. No, Soldan : nor dost thou. For thou art in His hands, even as I am ; and He careth for both alike, having for each of us the same compassion.

SOLDAN. As thou also for the ants ?

FRANCIS. Yes, Soldan. And they may have had kings among them,—yet I could not tell which *was* their king,—they being all so much alike—even as we are.

SOLDAN [*to an Attendant*]. Slave, bring in the lamps. . . . Thou and I alike, dost thou say ?

FRANCIS. In the eyes of God, Soldan ; aye, and of men also. For look !—thou hast hands, and feet, and so have I : and on each hand five fingers, and to each finger three joints ; and at the end are nails. So also our bodies,—search as thou wilt, we are made alike. Also what thou seest, I see ; and what thou hearest, I hear. In all these things we are alike, Soldan, because God has so willed Who made us.

[*Lights are brought in ; over the SOLDAN'S throne is set a lamp. Round the wall stand Torch-bearers. The outer air goes dark.*]

SOLDAN. That is true. Stand near, Brother Ant ! I would look on thee, and see more of that likeness to myself whereof thou speakest. . . . Aye ; thou hast a face and eyes, which now see ; thou hast limbs, and there is blood in them ; thou hast flesh

BROTHER SUN

that can feel pain ; and thou hast a head and a neck, even as I have. But for all we be so much alike, hast thou power to do presently what I shall do ?

FRANCIS. No, Soldan. Many things thou canst do which I cannot.

SOLDAN. Whence comes that ?

FRANCIS. From God, Soldan : not from thy feet, nor thy hands, nor thy head. That which a man does comes from his heart.

SOLDAN. Truly said.

FRANCIS. And thy heart and mine are two, not one. We be fellow men, but separate ; we look upon each other as strangers. But it is not so that God sees. For we see each with a difference ; but He, looking within, sees we are alike.

SOLDAN. How alike ?

FRANCIS. In heart we are alike, Soldan.

SOLDAN. Canst thou be sure of that ?

FRANCIS. Since God made us to the same end, that we might serve Him.

SOLDAN. I serve not thy God, Christian !

FRANCIS. Many *do* serve Him, not knowing.

SOLDAN. The service which I do is—different.

FRANCIS. Many wait on *thee*, Soldan, whose services are different. But for each there is a place, and all labour to one end. So thou and I,—serving God.

SOLDAN. What if I serve God by slaying thee ?

FRANCIS. Even so as, when good servants are hasty, platters get broken. Yet if thou break this poor platter, God shall pardon thee ; and thou wilt still serve Him, though how I know not.

SOLDAN. And what says the platter, when it is broken ?

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FRANCIS. I am willing to be broken, great King, if it make thee more careful of others. Many hast thou broken, and little good has it done thee. Peace comes not yet; and all thy breakings shall not bring it thee.

SOLDAN. Swordsman, draw!

[*The Swordsman draws his sword, and stands ready.*]

Emirs, Councillors, Judges, Servants of the Prophet, ye have heard this man and what he saith. How say ye? Is he innocent or guilty?

ALL. Guilty, O King.

SOLDAN. Unto what penalty?

ALL. Death.

SOLDAN. His offence?

COUNCILLOR. Great Soldan, this man is a dog and a blasphemer. Against thee, Sword of the Prophet, he hath said evil things, denying thy kingship and power. Also against our holy faith he hath spoken falsely.

SOLDAN. What saith the Prophet concerning him?

COUNCILLOR. That all Infidels must perish.

SOLDAN. Even so, let it be. Swordsman, hither. Have ready thy sword. Make the prisoner to kneel down.

[FRANCIS *kneels*. BROTHER ILLUMINATO *kneels also, looking toward FRANCIS with a face full of joy.*]

Brother Ant, I have heard thee. Hast thou said all thou wouldst say? . . . If not, now speak!

FRANCIS. O Soldan, while I have breath needs must I plead. For I have short life, and little wisdom, and my tongue is feeble. But He, whose messenger I am, is almighty, and infinite, and

BROTHER SUN

eternal ; and His glory is not as the glory of kings, —being without end. So, if I begin to tell of it, how may I finish ?

SOLDAN [*pointing to an hour-glass beside him, the sands of which are nearly run*]. A little time I yet give thee. While the sands in this glass still run, speak on !

FRANCIS [*stretching out his arms*]. As the sun be the King's reign ! The wisdom of God be thy rule : the love of God thy possession : the Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, be with thee, Soldan, when thou also comest to die !

SOLDAN [*to the Swordsman*]. Man, put up thy sword ! Loose him : and go ! Take with you that other prisoner : do no harm to him. Councillors and Judges, what I do now, I do of myself. Go, all of you !

[*They all go out. The SOLDAN remains seated, with FRANCIS kneeling before him.*]

Brother, come hither. . . . Sit near me. . . . Through all the world I have sought thee. Now, in the Camp of mine enemy, I find thee ! Oh, wherefor didst thou come ?

FRANCIS. To be thy lover and servant, Soldan.

SOLDAN. That is well : I have great need of thee. In my service thou shalt have power, and riches, and great honour ; for I will exalt thee, and make thee a ruler ; also thou shalt be taught the truths of our holy faith, and become a believer.

FRANCIS. That cannot be, Soldan. Power is of God, not of kings. Serving all, I rule none, and naught have I of possessions save Poverty. . . . Disband thine armies, Soldan. Fight not against

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the living God. Sheath thy sword, and possess thy land in peace.

SOLDAN. Peace? Who offers peace?

FRANCIS. He against whom thou fightest, Soldan.

SOLDAN. 'Tis of thy God thou speakest? Say then: [*he rises*] and speak truth! If I seek Him in the Camp of mine enemies—shall I find Him?

[FRANCIS bows his head, for it is a question he dares not answer.]

FRANCIS. Seek Him in thine own heart, Soldan. There shalt thou find peace.

SOLDAN. Thou hast answered well. . . . And yet thou art still one of them!

FRANCIS. I came to them a traveller from my own land, Soldan.

SOLDAN. To fight for them?

FRANCIS. Aye: even as I have fought for thee, saying the same words: 'Disband your armies; fight not against God; sheath your sword; go back to your own land in peace.'

SOLDAN. And they?

FRANCIS. They were like the ants, Soldan—very full of themselves.

SOLDAN. Not heeding thee?

FRANCIS. No man can heed that which he sees not—neither with eyes nor with heart.

SOLDAN [*with a touch of the visionary*]. What, then, have I seen? . . . Nay, I know not. Yet to my ears hath come a voice.

[*The torches and the Torchbearers have gone; and the only light now in the tent is the lamp which burns above the dais. SOLDAN sits in thought; and for a while there is silence.*]

BROTHER SUN

Presently, as the voice of his reverie, FRANCIS begins speaking.

FRANCIS. Look, Soldan, how bright in this tent shines the light! See, on walls, and roof, and armour, and jewels, how it glitters. But yonder at the door stands night, and thou seest naught of it,—neither the beauty, nor the spaces of heaven which lie over it, nor the stars which are contained there. Because this light has made a covering to thine eyes, therefore do the heavens look dark.

[FRANCIS *has risen, and stands looking out into the night.*

O Soldan, in thine own heart seek wisdom! The flame of Kingship and power is brief, and short-reaching, and by a breath it is put out. And with it shall depart the honour and fear and obedience and service which men render thee. These go, but thou remainest. Then, as a sleeper, that awakens when the lamp in his chamber is quenched, sees the door (which was darkness) changed to a window of light, and with his eyes searches the night, beholding the great spaces of heaven, and the stars that are hung in it, so in that day shalt thou see the standing of thy soul, and the home of thy inheritance to which thou travellest.

[*The SOLDAN has risen, and coming down from the dais, he stands beside FRANCIS.*

God is great, and infinite, and full of compassion. Thou art but a little thing: yet in His hand He holdeth and loveth thee. O Soldan, in that day of thine awakening, remember me, thy little lover and servant, and pray for me!

SOLDAN [*drawing him to the light*]. Come; aye,

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closer ; for again would I look upon thy face, and know more of thee. . . . [*They stand eye to eye under the lamp, silent awhile.*] Well said, Brother Ant. When I come to die, I shall remember thee.

[*He mounts the dais, strikes a bell, and puts out the lamp. The night grows luminous without. Presently in the doorway two Attendants are seen standing motionless.*

There is thy road : there is thy star, and thy heaven ! Go, thou art freer than I. Alas, that in my Kingdom never shall I see thee again.

FRANCIS. In the Kingdom of God, Brother, I pray that I shall see thee.

SOLDAN. There, when thou comest, look for me in thine own heart. If thou find me, there shall I be.

FRANCIS. Amen, Soldan. So—if God will !

SOLDAN. Take this signet, show it to the Captain of the Guard. Let him give command that thou and thy companion return in safety—to the Camp of mine enemy.

FRANCIS. Alas, then, for peace have I failed !

SOLDAN. Who knows ! . . . Farewell, Brother Ant.

FRANCIS. Farewell, great and gracious King, Brother-servant of my Lord !

[*FRANCIS goes out, followed, at a signal from the SOLDAN, by the two Attendants. The SOLDAN stands looking after him.*

SOLDAN. Farewell, Brother Sun.

[*From outside comes the cry of the Muezzin calling the faithful to prayer : ‘ There is one God, Allah, and Mahomet is his Prophet ! ’ The SOLDAN bares his feet, stands looking toward Mecca, and prays. The CURTAIN falls.*

PART III
THE FINDING

THE CHAPTER.

BROTHER JUNIPER.

BROTHER ELIAS.

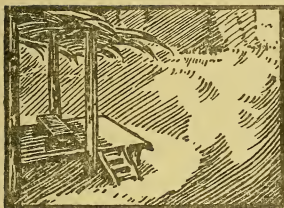
THE SERAPHIC VISION.

BROTHER SIN.

SISTER DEATH.

THE CHAPTER

A.D. 1221



It is late spring; and on a hill slope under the walls of Assisi the Chapter of the Brotherhood is being held. So great a concourse cannot all be seen at once; but here are the front ranks seated in rows upon the ground, with some sort of a bench to either side for the aged and infirm. Facing the assembled multitude, ranged tier above tier

along the rising ground, stands a rough table-like platform, approached at one end by a slope of steps. There on a low stool sits BROTHER MATTEO, presiding, with two others (JEROME and SIMON) his assistants, squatting to right and left of him. In front of him, on the platform, stands a big basket, for the present with nothing in it.

Shading the platform, and extending its shelter over the first few rows of the congregation, rough poles support a roof of woven boughs, thick with leaf. And thus, without pomp or circumstance, the family-gathering has come together for the ordering of its affairs. It is the last time that such circumstances will prevail: but very few know it; and the squatted Brethren are greatly enjoying themselves, singing, while voting goes on, a psalm which, in Latin, they appear to know by heart—a sign that book-learning (the beginning of the end) has already taken hold of them, while BROTHER FRANCIS has been away on his vain mission to make peace in Palestine.

But it is all being so joyously done that you would scarcely guess how order and ceremony are here beginning to find place. One of the Brothers, standing as precentor, before the platform, beats time with a bough of white blossom—perhaps because now is the season of Whitsuntide; and some of the Brothers, with smaller boughs of their own, wave back to him. Others with leathern pouches pass up and down the rows collecting the wooden tallies on

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which the votes have been recorded. They go briskly about it, for the chanting, antiphonal and quick in point, seems to be running them a race. And here, in another language, are some of the words which, from the zest of their utterance, seem most to voice the sense of the meeting.

He covereth the heaven with clouds : He prepareth rain for the earth : He maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.

He giveth food unto the cattle, He feedeth the young ravens which call upon Him.

He hath no pleasure in the strength of an horse, neither delighteth He in any man's legs.

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem : praise thy God, O Zion. For He hath strengthened the bars of thy gates : He hath blessed thy children within thee.

He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the flour of wheat.

He sendeth forth His commandments upon earth : His word runneth very swiftly.

He sheweth His word unto Jacob, His statutes and ordinances unto Israel.

He hath not dealt so with any nation : neither have the heathen knowledge of His laws.

[The 'Gloria' follows ; all rise to their feet. Having sung it, they sit down again. The Brothers, carrying the leathern pouches, advance and empty them into the big basket which stands in front of BROTHER MATTEO.]

MATTEO. The votes are all here, Brothers. Is it your will that we count them ?

ALL [*except one*]. Aye !

MATTEO. Is it any Brother's will that we do not count them ?

THE CHAPTER

JUNIPER [*not loud enough for BROTHER MATTEO to hear him*]. Aye : but I daren't say so.

[BROTHER GILES and BROTHER PACIFICO, who share the quiet corner he has found for himself, turn and look at him with puzzled eyes.

MATTEO. Brother Jerome, Brother Simon, and Brother Anthony will count them.

[A bench is brought and set to the front of the platform. BROTHER JEROME and BROTHER SIMON descend from their places, BROTHER ANTHONY joins them, and the three, using the platform as a table, empty the tallies from the basket, and begin counting.

MATTEO. While the votes are counting, Brothers, we will eat bread.

[Enter Brothers, bearing baskets of bread which they distribute. A pleasant babble of voices begins : The Brothers move freely from place to place talking to each other. BROTHER MATTEO stands for a while searching among the faces before him for one that is missing.

MATTEO. Where is Brother Francis ?

[A voice from behind the platform causes him to look around.

FRANCIS. I am here, Brother dear.

MATTEO. Why, what are you doing there ?

FRANCIS [*half whispering*]. I was asleep, Brother.

[BROTHER MATTEO, shaking his head at him, gets down from his perch. They pass into the crowd, and for a time we see no more of them.

A BROTHER. Brother Elias, many are seeking thee.

[ELIAS, a little consequential with the sense of his coming importance, passes into the crowd.

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The bread-carriers come by : GILES, JUNIPER, and PACIFICO take and begin eating.

GILES. Brother Juniper, why did you not wish the votes counted ?

JUNIPER. Because all they that voted be fools.

PACIFICO. Did not you vote, Brother ?

JUNIPER. Aye.

PACIFICO. Then you were a fool like the rest, Brother.

JUNIPER. Did you ever know me wise ?

GILES. Sometimes I have suspected it. Brother, tell us, now : whom did you vote for ?

JUNIPER. The little Father, of course. Who else ?

PACIFICO. Who else ? When we are all here to choose another in the place of him !

JUNIPER. There is no other. You cannot change the father that once begot you.

GILES. He will still be our father, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Not if Brother Elias knows it, he won't be.

PACIFICO. Why Brother Elias ? I voted for Brother Elias.

JUNIPER. Ah ! you're one of them ! Brother Giles didn't, I'm thinking.

GILES. I voted for you, Juniper.

[BROTHER PACIFICO'S *face of eloquent astonishment at finding himself seated between two such fools is not to be conveyed in words.*

JUNIPER. Ah, if they chose me that would settle it.

PACIFICO. How, Brother ?

JUNIPER. I'd tell the little Father, on holy obedience, to come back again.

PACIFICO. But he himself has said, Brother, that the charge is too much for him.

THE CHAPTER

JUNIPER. 'Tis we, then, that have made it so. While his back was turned they've been shaping out new rules for us that were none of his making. I know it well: for I can't put down a foot now, but what I break one. Father Francis broke one himself the other day! . . . No matter.

PACIFICO [*horrificed*]. Did he, Brother?

JUNIPER. Aye: the Lord bless it to him!

GILES. What rule did he break, Brother?

JUNIPER. Ate meat on a Monday. Why shouldn't he? A beggar gave it him. Are we to refuse charity because of the rules?

PACIFICO. If it be for holy obedience, Brother—we must.

JUNIPER. Obedience? If they tell you to bite on a bad tooth, must you do it?

GILES. Brother, Brother!

JUNIPER. Yes, but it's true, Brother dear. I've done so many sins in the last week, without knowing it, that I'll never overtake myself. And then Father Francis came back, and I thought—'Oh, here's a chance for me!' And now what does he do but tell us we've got to be orphans still—like we were all the year he's been away. . . . Did you see him sitting asleep just now? He's worn out.

GILES. He has had many things to do, Brother.

JUNIPER. Aye, and more they won't let him do! That's what's going to break his heart for him.

PACIFICO. Break his heart, you say?

GILES [*rising and laying his hand on JUNIPER'S head*]. On holy obedience, I charge thee to talk less, Juniper. [GILES *moves away*.]

JUNIPER. There! I've put my foot in it again.

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PACIFICO. 'Break his heart!' What did you mean, Brother ?

JUNIPER. Nothing. . . . I meant nothing. I'm a thing that's got no meaning in me. A fool! Go and talk to somebody that's wise. You're biting on a bad tooth if you talk to me.

PACIFICO [*delicately offended.*] Very well, Brother, I will leave you.

[JUNIPER, *left to himself, becomes eloquent of his grief.*

JUNIPER. O Lord, what am I going to do with myself ? If they'd cook me and eat me, I'd be useful to 'em for one day at any rate. But I'm like a cart, off its wheels and stuck in a rut, and in the way just !

[*While thus he bewails himself FRANCIS comes from a group behind, sights him, and sits down by his side.*

FRANCIS. Brother Juniper ?

[JUNIPER *at once forgets his own grief and is all tenderness.*

JUNIPER. Father dear, are you tired, Father ?

FRANCIS. Brother Ass is tired. Not I.

JUNIPER. Let me stroke him for you, Father. Eh, the dear beast that's always done his best for us ! Rub his legs—or his back ; shall I, Father ?

FRANCIS. No, Juniper. Only talk to me.

JUNIPER. Talk to ye ? Father, how is it that whenever you look as if you were going to cry, you come and make me talk to you ?

FRANCIS. So that I may laugh, Brother.

JUNIPER. Ah ! I'm a fool, I know. Did God send fools into the world so as to make men laugh ?

THE CHAPTER

FRANCIS. Very likely, Brother. Why not ?

JUNIPER. Does He laugh Himself, Father ?

FRANCIS. He may well laugh at thee, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Eh ! That 's a mighty great honour !

FRANCIS. Yes.

JUNIPER. Being a fool 's a great thing, if God finds a use for it.

FRANCIS. Aye, truly ! [*Then in a deeply moved tone*] Dear fool, lay thy hand on me !

[JUNIPER *does so with great reverence and tenderness.*]

JUNIPER. O Father ! You 're not going to cry, are you ?

FRANCIS. No, Brother ; I am going to laugh.

JUNIPER [*rather as a secret, but hoping it may cheer him*]. I voted for you, Father ; though, maybe, I was the only one that did.

FRANCIS. Thou child of Folly, what didst thou do that for ?

JUNIPER. Like you put yeast into the dough to make it rise. A little goes a long way. And if 'twas God counted our votes, He 'd make them *all* count, wouldn't He, Father ?—mine as well as the rest : else why was I voting ?

FRANCIS. Very true, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Am I talking foolishness, Father ?

FRANCIS. No, Brother.

JUNIPER. But you wouldn't have me be wise ?

FRANCIS. I would have thee be thyself, Juniper. Wise or unwise, thou art ever a thing of wonder.

JUNIPER. Am I, Father ? Then 'tis all thy doing. Sure, I 've lost myself.

[BROTHER LEO *approaches : stands looking at*

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them, then says diffidently, lest he should be intruding,

LEO. Brothers—may I sit with you.

FRANCIS. Come, Brother Leo, come!

[He makes room for him, and LEO sits down, taking hold of the little Father's sleeve and holding it. FRANCIS turns back to JUNIPER.]

Lost thyself? How?

JUNIPER. Like a fish on a hook, Father. It's like this: for all I'd so little sense to begin on, I'd enough left in me to know what a fool I was. But now there's no beginning and no end to it. *[He sighs, pauses, then adds]* Once I used to be afraid.

FRANCIS. Of what, Brother?

JUNIPER *[at a loss where to begin]*. Oh,—of the dark, Father, and hunger, and cold, and robbers, and murderers, and riches, Father. All the things that every one's afraid of, if they've got the sense for it. And now I'm such a fool, I'm not afraid of anything—except of Brother Elias.

FRANCIS. Why of him, Juniper?

JUNIPER *[after thinking awhile]*. He's so holy, Father!

FRANCIS. Learn to love him, Juniper; then you will cease to fear him.

JUNIPER *[pensively]*. I know that, Father.

[There is silence for a while; LEO has taken FRANCIS'S hand, and sits holding it, sad of spirit.]

FRANCIS. What art thou thinking now, Juniper?

JUNIPER *[emerging from his reflections]*. Father, dear, . . . I used to be afraid of women. And

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wasn't it right ? Brother Elias said Mother Church told us to be. But now I'm not, Father ; I'm not. Oughtn't that to make me ashamed of myself ?

[BROTHER GILES *comes and sits down by them.*

FRANCIS. If thou canst live without fear, Brother, thou art the better for it.

JUNIPER [*doubtfully*]. It 's a sense gone, Father.

FRANCIS. Very true. And had we fewer senses we might come quicker to Heaven.

JUNIPER. But if we lost them all, Father,—we 'd not be ourselves, then.

FRANCIS. Again thou speakest wisdom, Juniper. What has made thee so wise to-day ?

JUNIPER. I 'm not myself, Father. Something 's happened. I 'm got like the devils that went into the pigs and made them kill themselves.

FRANCIS. Why, what now, Juniper ?

JUNIPER. They 've caught it off me.

FRANCIS. Who ?

JUNIPER. All of 'em. And now I 'll be no use to anybody—except you, Father, and maybe one or two like you. [*He almost weeps at the thought.*

FRANCIS. Come, Juniper ! What is thy trouble ?

JUNIPER. It 's like this, Father ; when I first came, you took me because I was a fool, didn't you ?

FRANCIS. Very likely. It was a good reason.

JUNIPER. And because I was no use to any one.

FRANCIS. Not if they used thee ill. But the Brothers have used thee well. . . . Have they not ?

JUNIPER. They 've used me up, Father. They 've all become fools like me. I 'm no use to fools. They can't laugh at me.

FRANCIS. They will laugh at thee, Juniper : even so.

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JUNIPER [*wistfully*]. Will they, Father ?

FRANCIS. For thy foolishness is so great, that foolish and wise alike laugh at thee. And none shall ever be like thee, Juniper, try how they may.

JUNIPER. Is that true, Father ?

FRANCIS. Most true, Juniper.

GILES and LEO. It is, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Oh, praise the Lord for that !

FRANCIS. So we do. Teach us to be fools like thee, Juniper, and thou wilt do well.

JUNIPER [*much relieved*]. Oh, well !—so long as they are catching it the right way, *I* don't mind. But you 'll never have Brother Elias thanking God for me—not like you.

FRANCIS. Who knows, Brother ? I have seen even greater marvels.

JUNIPER. Brother Elias wouldn't believe you. . . . What are you laughing at, Father ?

FRANCIS [*who was only smiling*]. Because to-day I did well.

JUNIPER. That 's no news. What did you do ?

FRANCIS. I voted for thee, Juniper.

LEO. So did I, Brother.

GILES. And I, as I told thee.

[FRANCIS, LEO, and GILES *sit smiling at him, very much pleased with themselves*. JUNIPER'S *face is a picture*.

JUNIPER. The Lord forgive you ! What did you do it for ?

FRANCIS. So that I might dream.

JUNIPER. Dream what ?

FRANCIS. The wolf, also, shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ;

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and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together ; and a little child shall lead them. . . .
A little child, Juniper.

JUNIPER [*shaking his head*]. So you are a fool, too, Father !

FRANCIS. Yes.

JUNIPER [*kissing the hem of his robe*]. Ah ! but you 're the right kind !

[*Meanwhile the Counters have not been idle ; nor have their labours been conducted with any great secrecy. Brothers have come and looked over their shoulders and reported to others. And as they have done so, the coming event has cast its shadow before, and BROTHER ELIAS has become the centre of an obsequious throng. Now the counting is over ; BROTHER MATTEO is summoned, and accompanied by his assistants, mounts once more to preside over the assembly. The Brothers come flocking back to their places ; but are far too much excited either to sit or arrange themselves in rows. A list is put into BROTHER MATTEO'S hand ; he stands up to speak.*]

MATTEO. The votes are all counted, Brothers. To five names votes have been given. I will read them.

Brother Gregorio, seven hundred and forty-three.

Brother Matteo (myself), three hundred and twenty-nine.

Brother Elias [*a stir of expectation runs through the assembly*], twelve hundred and fifty-two. [*The stir increases.*]

Brother Juniper [*a murmur of suppressed laughter goes round*], three.

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Brother Francis [*a murmur of astonishment*], one.
Brother Elias, you are chosen.

[*The announcement is followed by great applause.*

BROTHER ELIAS *is pushed forward by his supporters, and mounts the platform; as he appears before them the applause becomes tumultuous.*

BROTHER MATTEO *vacates his place, kneels and kisses the cord of BROTHER ELIAS'S girdle. The two assistants do likewise.* BROTHER ELIAS, *advancing to the front of the platform, faces the throng of Brothers Minor, whose Vicar-General he now is. He raises his hand. All voices are hushed.*

ELIAS. Where is Brother Francis ?

[*Suddenly he looks down, and sees FRANCIS prostrated before him. FRANCIS kisses the feet of BROTHER ELIAS. ELIAS stoops, raises and makes him stand beside him.*

ELIAS. O Brother, Father in God, speak for me to these thy children, that I also to them may be a father !

[FRANCIS *kneels.*

FRANCIS. O Christ, sweet Lover of men, now I return to Thee this Thy family which Thou gavest me to make Thine. Now Lord, as Thou knowest, I have not left in me strength or power or wisdom enough to keep care of them. Therefore I give them, henceforth, to the care of ministers. Let them so have charge that, in the Day when souls stand to be judged, they may be accountable if any brother, by their negligence or harsh rule or evil example, have erred or strayed from Thy fold.

[*He rises from his knees and takes BROTHER ELIAS by the hand.*

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Little Brothers, ye that have heard my voice as your shepherd, from henceforth look on me as dead ; for here in my place stands Brother Elias, whom you and I will all obey. [*He turns to BROTHER ELIAS.*] Brother Elias, to thee I have given my flock, be thou its shepherd !

[*Kissing the hem of BROTHER ELIAS'S robe, he turns to go. Already, among the Brethren, his prayer and farewell words have evoked tears and lamentations. Now an indescribable emotion seizes them, and a cry rises from many lips at once.*

VOICES. Little Father ! Little Father ! Give us thy blessing ere thou go !

[*FRANCIS stretches out his hands over them in blessing.*

FRANCIS. God give you peace, Brothers !

[*Suddenly from all sides breaks out a universal cry from the heart of the brotherhood.*

ALL. Don't go ! Don't leave us, little Father ! Little Father, don't go !

[*In a paroxysm of love and grief, they rush towards him, fling themselves at his feet, clasp his hands, embrace him in passionate tenderness. Engulfed in the arms of his lovers, he is seen swaying hither and thither like a vessel tossed by waves.*

JUNIPER [*weeping*]. See there, now ! See there ! What he said is true ! We are not such fools after all !—Eh, but it 's too late now !

CURTAIN

BROTHER JUNIPER



In the Consistory, a large circular chamber with bare walls and small windows set aloft, sits FATHER PRIOR ELIAS, judicially enthroned on a dais two-thirds of the way round; the door is placed correspondingly to the other side. Around the walls sit the Brethren; some are still entering, when FATHER PRIOR gives the signal for business to commence.

PRIOR. In nomine Patris, Filii, et Spiritus sancti.

[He crosses himself, the others do likewise. A Brother who sits at his feet to make record of the proceedings puts a written memorandum into his hand.]

Brother Juniper.

JUNIPER [*rising*]. Yes, Father.

PRIOR. Stand out where all may look on thee!

JUNIPER. Yes, Father.

[JUNIPER advances to the centre, and begins weeping.]

PRIOR [*sternly*]. Why art thou weeping?

JUNIPER. I know not, Father. It's something in the air, and being fixed here alone, with you all looking at me. Oh, where is Father Francis?

PRIOR. He is coming, Brother. . . . Dost thou know I have had complaint of thee?

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JUNIPER. Aye, Father, likely enough; for I complain often of myself.

PRIOR. Thou may'st well. All the Brethren complain of thee.

JUNIPER. Do they? The Lord bless it to them. They've reason for it, Father; you needn't doubt. It's all true. Oh, where's Father Francis?

Enter FRANCIS.

FRANCIS. I am here, Brother.

JUNIPER. O Father Francis, sit where I may look at you: else I'll break my heart.

PRIOR. Brother Francis, sit where he cannot look at you.

[FRANCIS goes and sits on the end seat, behind JUNIPER and facing the PRIOR.]

JUNIPER. There's a blow! O Father Prior, cut off my head, for I haven't got one! What have I done? If ever there was a sinner, it's me.

PRIOR. Brother Rufus.

RUFUS. Father Prior, I was in the kitchen making the bread. And when my back was turned, Brother Juniper——

JUNIPER. Aye: it's true.

PRIOR. Be silent, Brother Juniper! Go on, Brother Rufus!

RUFUS. Brother Juniper, he came in, and put everything—meat, bread, and vegetables—into the oven together, and spoiled them. And when I came back there he was very proud of himself, Father, and full of telling me what he'd done. So the Brothers had nothing to eat that day that didn't taste as though it had died in mortal sin.

BROTHER JUNIPER

You know that, Father, yourself. He hadn't even skinned the rabbits, and all the fur of them was burnt. I speak truth, Father Prior, I do not lie.

PRIOR. Brother Juniper.

JUNIPER. It's all true, Father. Only the day before I'd heard him say 'twas such a trouble—so much cooking for so many of us, and we with such big bellies, and he so tired of it. So I thought I'd show him the shorter way to satisfy us all. And it was that, wasn't it, Father? And it wasn't that I'd forgotten to skin the rabbits, Father; but I thought their rinds come off in the cooking like the rind of a locust. I was a fool, Father; and I still am; and Brother Rufus hasn't forgiven me for it yet. Pray to God for me, Brother Rufus, that I may—

PRIOR. Brother Jerome.

JEROME. Father Prior, a week since, at thy bidding, I told Brother Juniper he should no longer give all the clothes off his back to every beggar that asked. Six times in the last month, Father, had we to find clothes for him, for always did he come back naked when he was let out alone. For a week, Father, he was obedient; he kept his clothes, and he did not go out. Yesterday he went out again; and came back naked.

PRIOR. Brother Juniper.

JUNIPER. It's true, Father; I did come back naked; but there was no help for it.

PRIOR. Thou hast broken obedience, Brother.

JUNIPER. No, no; indeed, Father! When I went out, I met a beggar,—a sturdy rogue, much bigger than me, Father. He said, 'Give me thy coat!' I said, 'I may not give it thee. But if

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thou wilt take it from me by force I shall be glad.' So he took it, Father. What could I do? Has not Father Francis told us——

PRIOR. Brother Angelo.

ANGELO. Father, thou know'st that in the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament is a new cloth, given to us by the Lady Giacomina, that had silver bells on it. After primes this morning, Brother Juniper being at the gate, a woman came and begged money for her husband that is in prison for theft. And because he had no money, Brother Juniper went to the altar, cut off the bells and gave her those.

[At this enormity consternation and horror fall upon the community: FRANCIS alone seems unconcerned.]

PRIOR. Brother Juniper.

JUNIPER. It's true, Father Prior. But our Lord Himself told me to do it.

PRIOR. How did our Lord tell thee?

JUNIPER. Didn't He say—some time or another—either when He was dying, or when—I don't know, Father: but did He not say, 'Whatever ye receive freely, ye must give freely.' And as the Lady Giacomina had given us those bells, hadn't I to give them to her that was in need? For didn't our Father Francis——

PRIOR. If any other Brother hath charge or accusation to bring, let him speak now.

[One rises, and makes obeisance.]

Brother Simon.

SIMON. Father Prior, when Brother Juniper goes to feed the pigs he kisses them. Is it right that a Christian should kiss pigs?

BROTHER JUNIPER

JUNIPER. I do kiss them, Father, I do ; and they kiss me, sinner that I am ! God be with them !

PRIOR. Any other ? [*Another rises.*] Brother Anthony.

ANTHONY. Indeed, Father Prior, we have so much against him, that there is no beginning and no end to it. For where Brother Juniper sets foot or lays hand, neither order nor sanity is left,—nor peace from the trouble he causes us. He turns wisdom to foolishness, making us be fools in men's eyes, so that they laugh at us. And as he grows older he gets worse and not better, Father. [*Another rises.*]

PRIOR. Brother John.

JOHN. Father, when we see Brother Juniper coming into the midst of us it breaks our heart ; for we all love him, yet there is no bearing him ; nor have we any safety from what he may do next. Indeed, Father Prior, it were better that he were anywhere but here. Give him thy blessing, Father, and let him go ; lest he bring scandal on all the brotherhood.

PRIOR. Brother Juniper, thou hast heard what the Brothers witness against thee ?

JUNIPER. Aye, Father.

PRIOR. What is thy answer ?

JUNIPER. Nothing, Father.

PRIOR. Nothing ? Dost thou count as nothing all these things wherewith they have charged thee ?

JUNIPER. O Father, what they have said of me they have said in true charity, and only of the faults they know. But did they know me inside out as God knows me, they must have said worse.

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PRIOR. What shall be done to thee, Brother, now thou hast confessed thy guilt ?

JUNIPER. Truly, Father, let me be punished as I would wish to be punished. That would teach me, I think.

PRIOR. Yea, speak then.

JUNIPER. Father, let me lie for a week in the gate ; and let all them that go in or out step on me, yea, stand with both feet and jump on me. And as they go by let them spit and say, 'Thou dirty dog, thou mud-pie, thou son of the dust, thou broken and rotten spine of a Juniper, take heart and thank God that for love of Him we deal thus mercifully and leniently with thee, and not according to thy miserable deserts !' Let them do this to me, Father, having pity and forgiveness in their hearts, and I will be thankful so to be found worthy to be of such use to them.

PRIOR. Of what use—so, Brother ?

JUNIPER. An exercise for charity, Father ; God bless it to them ! And God bless you all, Brothers. The Lord love you !

PRIOR. Brother Juniper, we have heard them that accuse thee : we have heard also thine answer ; and it is no answer. For thou thyself hast owned that what they say against thee is true. Very grievously art thou to blame, Brother ; going thine own way thou hast provoked others, and thy delight hath been in mischief. In wantonness thou didst waste our substance ; by deceit thou wast disobedient ; and by presumption thou hast wrought sacrilege. Also by folly thou hast given us an ill reputation, doing hurt to the Order, and causing offence to

BROTHER JUNIPER

weaker minds. For these things, Brother, thou dost well to beat thy breast and be ashamed. Search thy heart in penitence for what thou hast done. . . . Confess thyself and seek forgiveness of all. . . . Brother Juniper, dost thou repent ?

[JUNIPER'S head goes up and down, open-mouthed he tries to affirm his penitence : finally word comes.

JUNIPER. Aye !

PRIOR. Brother Juniper, for penance—[at the word 'penance' JUNIPER pulls up his frock and kneels on bare knees]—I now command thee, on holy obedience, that thou go not forth from these gates, nor speak to any that be outside, or that come hither, until I bid thee. And further, thou shalt not speak unto any of the Brethren except when they bid thee speak on holy obedience, or for such things as shall be necessary ; and namely for the praise of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ in the holy office and before the altar. [He rises, and with swift motion makes the sign of the cross toward the community.] Nunc dimittis Domine. Pax vobiscum.

BROTHERS. Amen.

[The FATHER PRIOR goes quickly out ; the rest follow, all except FRANCIS. BROTHER JUNIPER remains kneeling. His mouth works like a fish biting at flies ; he beats his breast.

FRANCIS. Brother Juniper, . . . let us sing !

[JUNIPER makes signs that he may not. On holy obedience, Juniper, I bid thee sing.

[Bewildered, JUNIPER makes further signs. Yea, and speak also.

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JUNIPER. What shall I sing, Father ?

[FRANCIS *helps him to his feet.*

FRANCIS. As I will teach thee. Begin thus :
Praise God for our Brother Juniper !

JUNIPER [*aghast*]. Am I to sing that, Father ?

FRANCIS. Aye, and more shall follow. Now, on holy obedience, as I have told thee, begin.

[*Very lamentably* BROTHER JUNIPER *lifts up his voice and drones in miserere tone the praise he so much disapproves.*

JUNIPER. Praise God for our Brother Juniper !
It doesn't seem right, Father !

FRANCIS. No other fool on earth is like unto him.

JUNIPER [*with better courage*]. No other fool on earth is like unto him. . . . I can sing that, Father, with a good conscience.

FRANCIS [*reprovingly at this breach of the rule*]. Sh! . . . By his foolishness he confoundeth the ways of the wise.

JUNIPER [*still in Gregorian tones*]. By his foolishness he confoundeth the ways of the wise.

FRANCIS. And by his inconsequence disturbeth the counsels of the prudent.

JUNIPER. And by his incompetence disturbeth the counsels of the prudent.

FRANCIS. Improve not upon my words, Juniper : but 'incompetence' will do.

JUNIPER. Improve not upon my words, Juniper, but incompetence will do.

FRANCIS [*restraining his mirth with difficulty*]. O Lord, in the making of this fool, how great a fool thou hast made him.

BROTHER JUNIPER

JUNIPER. Lord, in the making of this fool, how great a fool thou hast made him.

FRANCIS. When Folly openeth her mouth he goeth down into it.

JUNIPER. When Folly openeth her mouth he goeth down into it.

FRANCIS. As Jonah into the belly of the whale which God had prepared for him.

JUNIPER. As Jonah into the belly of the whale which God had prepared for him.

FRANCIS. But therefrom, after a time, he returneth alive.

JUNIPER. But therefrom, after a time, he returneth alive.

FRANCIS. And preacheth repentance to the inhabitants of Nineveh.

JUNIPER. And preacheth repentance to the inhabitants of Nineveh.

[And now FRANCIS, seized by the spirit of song, begins to chant also, laying his arm across the shoulder of JUNIPER; and so the couple are standing when the FATHER PRIOR re-enters, and from behind gazes upon them in astonishment.]

FRANCIS. City of Nineveh.

JUNIPER. City of Nineveh.

FRANCIS. Look upon Juniper!

JUNIPER. Look upon Juniper!

FRANCIS. Great is his foolishness.

JUNIPER. Great is his foolishness.

FRANCIS. Like unto Charity.

JUNIPER. Like unto Charity.

[FRANCIS ceases any longer to wait for JUNIPER:]

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he goes his own pace, and JUNIPER stumbles after him, picking up as many of the words as he can master. Thus, in a fragmentary fashion, the duet continues.

FRANCIS and JUNIPER.

Nineveh, Nineveh,

What are you weeping for ?

Blindness and hardness of heart without charity.

Nineveh, Nineveh,

What are you seeking for ?

Juniper's foolishness, prize above rubies.

[Listening to all this, the face of their spiritual superior becomes eloquent. BROTHER ELIAS will never feel safe about the Order while these two are in it. Dead and canonised, he may find a use for them : but living they are really impossible. And so he throws up his hands and goes, while the two continue blissfully to chant the praise of foolishness.

Prize above rubies ;

Take it and spend it !

Nothing can equal it ;

Nothing can mend it.

Pearls before swine it is ;

Find it or lose it !

Sweeter than wine it is ;

Therefore I choose it.

FRANCIS. And now, on holy obedience, Brother, I bid thee hold thy tongue again. To-morrow, for the same purpose, at about this hour, we will meet again.

[JUNIPER makes a gesture, but may no longer say anything. His heart is full of its own

BROTHER JUNIPER

sweetness, and he stands lost in the new bliss that has been provided him. As for FRANCIS, his good work accomplished, he departs, light of step; and the tune he goes to is that which he has just composed to the honour of BROTHER JUNIPER.

Nineveh, Nineveh,

What are you weeping for ?

Blindness and hardness of heart without charity.

Nineveh, Nineveh,

What are you seeking for ?

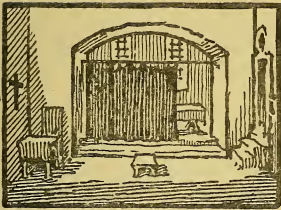
Juniper's foolishness, prize above rubies.

[And so, sweetly singing, his voice dies away in the distance. JUNIPER remains himself.]

CURTAIN



BROTHER ELIAS



Scene: a room adjoining the refectory. Against the wall is a chair, and before it a small table. Above the chair hangs a crucifix. BROTHER ELIAS, the FATHER PRIOR, is discovered seated. Before him stands BROTHER RUFUS.

ELIAS. What said he then ?

RUFUS. He said, Father, that we were to do work for our living, and that we were not to receive churches, nor dwellings, nor any roof to shelter us, except as conformed with holy poverty.

ELIAS. 'Conformed' ? Said he in what way ?

RUFUS. He said, Father, that if any man wished to deprive us of them we must give them up to him. He said that we were not to receive hospitality therein, save as pilgrims and strangers ; and he said, Father, that if any bade us break this rule we were not bound to obey.

ELIAS. Did he say—that ye should not obey ?

RUFUS. Against the breaking of this rule he said it.

ELIAS. He knows that I would speak with him ?

RUFUS. Yes, Father ; he is out there waiting.

ELIAS. Bid him come in.

[RUFUS goes toward the door, then hesitates and turns.]

RUFUS. We all love him, Father.

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ELIAS. Yes, Brother ; and ye do well.

RUFUS. What I have told thee now, Father, I have told because of holy obedience.

ELIAS. As I bade thee. Yes : that is all, Brother.

[RUFUS *does not look happy, but he goes.* ELIAS *rises, with a certain formality of gesture, turns to the crucifix and stands before it in prayer.*

Eripe me, Domine, ab homine malo ; a viro iniquo eripe me. Intret oratio mea in conspectu tuo, Domine ; ostende mihi, Domine, misericordiam tuam.

[FRANCIS *has entered, and stands waiting in the doorway.* BROTHER ELIAS *moves from the crucifix and stands with head bent in thought.*

FRANCIS. Father Prior, Brother Elias, thou didst send for me.

ELIAS. Come in, Brother Francis, sit down. I would speak with thee.

[FRANCIS *comes in ; but still stands, leaving vacant the stool of repentance which stands in the centre.* ELIAS *seats himself.*

ELIAS. Thou dost pray for me, Brother ?

FRANCIS. Aye, Father.

ELIAS. And for all the Brethren thou prayest also ?

FRANCIS. Aye, Father.

ELIAS. Doth it repent thee, Brother, that God put it into thy heart to give charge of thy flock unto others ?

FRANCIS. No, Father.

ELIAS. Thou knowest also how, by their voice, the rule was given unto me.

FRANCIS. The rule was given unto thee,—to keep, Father.

BROTHER ELIAS

ELIAS. Wherefor, then, dost thou teach as I have commanded thee not ?

FRANCIS. As God hath commanded me, Father, so I teach.

ELIAS. I bade thee to sit down, Brother. [FRANCIS *seats himself on the doorstep. A pause.*] Brother, if I bade thee to go a long journey, and preach to men who knew not thy language,—wouldst thou do it ?

FRANCIS. Yes, Father.

ELIAS. Though they should understand thee not ?

FRANCIS. If God so willed, they would understand, Father.

ELIAS. True. And if I bade thee preach by signs only, wouldst thou do it ?

FRANCIS. Yes, Father.

ELIAS. And if I bade thee preach neither by voice, nor by sign, but only by silence, saying nothing—wouldst thou do that also. [*A pause.*] What is thy answer ?

FRANCIS. If thou so command me on holy obedience,—I will do it, Father.

ELIAS. Brother, I do not so command thee ; for I know well that God hath put love in thy heart, and that by word and example thou hast saved many. Therefore because thou hast loved much, much shall be forgiven thee. Nevertheless, Brother, thou hast done ill to meddle in those things which for the ordering of the Brotherhood are now committed unto others. So I charge thee, on holy obedience [FRANCIS, *making the sign of the cross, kneels*], speak no more of that which concerns thee not, of rule, and order, and discipline. Or if thou

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must speak when others question thee, then let thy word be of submission and obedience to those that are in authority—leaving unto them the interpretation of it. So shall there be unity in the Order instead of confusion. . . . Thou hast heard, Brother. Wilt thou obey? [*A pause.*]

FRANCIS. Yes, Father.

ELIAS. Brother Francis, it is hard for thee, I know, to humble thyself in this Order which thou hast made, and to obey others. For me also, that am thy son in the spirit, it is hard to speak thus, ruling thee by the word of authority. But what thou hast given thou hast given; and Holy Church hath accepted at thy hand this jewel which was thy finding rare and precious. So through thy love of men shall be seen the love of Heaven. Now Mother Church wears it upon her breast, and by the warmth of her love and the light of her wisdom its power of radiance increaseth. Yea, so much doth she cherish and care for it, that now it hath become one of the stones of her foundation. On it she buildeth, on it she setteth up a tower, on it she raiseth a standard and an ensign for the nations. Brother, seek not to unbuild that wall, and that high tower, to take back into thine own keeping this jewel, once thine, too great for thy possession. That which thou hast given belongs now to God only. Put thy trust in Him, and thou shalt do well.

[*ELIAS takes a parchment and writes on it.*]

FRANCIS *bows forward and begins to write in the dust. Twilight has begun.*

ELIAS. I have spoken, Brother, for thy good.

FRANCIS. Father Prior, I thank thee.

BROTHER ELIAS

[*Having paused to speak, he continues writing.*

ELIAS *sits watching him.*

ELIAS. What art thou writing, Brother ?

FRANCIS. Thy reproof, and my sentence, Father.

ELIAS. Read it, for I would hear.

FRANCIS. 'Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat; for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.' Father Prior, Brother Elias, pray for me !

[*ELIAS rises, and makes to go. The room gets dark.*

ELIAS. God be with thee, Brother. I am sorry that I have given thee pain.

FRANCIS. God bless thee for thy pains, Father.

[*Exit BROTHER ELIAS.*

[*FRANCIS still kneels, he wrestles with himself; then lifting his hands begins brokenly to sing the Cantic of the Sun.*

Praised be my Lord for all being,
And namely praise for our Brother Sun,
Who bringeth us day and light for seeing;
With joy he cometh his course to run.

[*BROTHER LEO enters with a taper, and lights the lamp over the door into the refectory. In the refectory one sees a table being laid.*

FRANCIS *rises to his feet. Other Brothers begin to come in. They join one after another in the singing.*

FRANCIS. Also for Sister Moon be praise,

LEO. And for the stars which stand on high.

FRANCIS. Lovely, and clear, in heavenly ways,

LEO. Of Thee to us they do testify.

FRANCIS. Praised be my Lord for Brother Wind,
And air, and cloud, and calms of weather;

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

BROTHERS. Whereby all creatures thou dost bind
Into one fellowship together.

FRANCIS. Praised be my Lord for Mother Earth ;

LEO. Us she holdeth in care and keep.

BROTHERS. And divers fruits she bringeth to birth,
Flowers to array, and grass to reap.

FRANCIS. Praised be my Lord for all who give—

BROTHERS. Pardon to others for His Love's sake,

FRANCIS. And meekly endure in pains to live ;

BROTHERS. In Him they rest, and in Him shall wake.

[*A pause.* FRANCIS, *looking from one to the other,*
seems for the first time to be fully aware of them.

FRANCIS. So the voices—were yours, Brothers ?

LEO. We are come—as you told us, little Father.

FRANCIS. Aye ? Wherefor, little sheep ?

JUNIPER. To hear the shepherd's voice, Father.

LEO. Thou didst promise.

FRANCIS. What, Brother ?

LEO. To speak to us.

FRANCIS. God bless you, Brothers. [*A pause.*

JUNIPER. Is that all it 's to be, Father ?

FRANCIS. Is not that enough ? God bless you
again, Brothers ; and yet again ; and yet again !
When I can do that no more, do it to each other.

JUNIPER. Father, thou hast been weeping.
What have we done wrong ?

FRANCIS. O little sheep, little sheep, hearing my
voice, how have ye strayed from the right way !

LEO. Never from thee, Father !

FRANCIS. Nay ; but from obedience — very
grievously.

JUNIPER. Have we been disobedient, Father ?

FRANCIS. Alas ! surely. For if one disobey,

BROTHER ELIAS

then all that follow are disobedient likewise. Therefore follow not—me.

JUNIPER. Where am I to go then, Father ?

FRANCIS. I know not, Brother ; for when obedience taketh me by the hand—I am blind. And she is blind also.

LEO. Tell us, Father. How shall we obey—if we neither know, nor see ?

FRANCIS. It is like this, Brother. Take a dead body and put it where you will, it resists not. Place it there, it will not murmur ; take it away, it will not object. Put it in a pulpit, it will only hang its head and look down ; clothe it in purple, and you shall only see more plainly how dead it is. So, if ye would obey, ye also must be deaf and blind and dead : even as I now am dead unto those that I love.

JUNIPER. Art thou going from us, Father ?

FRANCIS. In a little while, when Father Prior hath given me leave.

LEO. May I go with thee, Father ?

FRANCIS. Yes, if he will let thee.

ANGELO. And I, Father ?

FRANCIS. Aye, if it be God's will.

JUNIPER. May I go, too, Father ?

FRANCIS. No, Juniper. Stay here with the rest ; Father Prior hath need of thee.

JUNIPER. This is the first I've heard of it then. Sure, he would like to be rid of me !

FRANCIS. Where wisdom and prudence are the rule, fools are precious, Brother.

LEO. Our rule is from thee, Father. Oh, how shall we obey it when thou art dead ?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCIS. As I told thee, Brother. Ye must be dead also.

LEO. Alas, Father. We do not understand.

FRANCIS [*seating himself*]. Seemeth this to you a hard saying? But it is simple. Sister Wood is dead; yet when I sit on her she serveth me well; nor hath she any wish to do otherwise. Brother Bread yonder is dead also; yet he feedeth us. So by his means we live and praise God daily. And thus it is with all: living we must needs take from others for our own sustenance: but dying we do service, having thenceforth nothing which is our own. See, then, how sweet and pleasant a thing, Brethren, it is to die! . . . Brother Juniper, what is that lies yonder?

JUNIPER. This wooden platter, Father?

FRANCIS. Nay, nay, that is my lute; give it me! Now look you and hearken, though Sister Lute hath no strings she shall make music for us. Though dead she speaketh. This that ye hear now, is it not sweet? And when it is over shall ye not remember it?

[FRANCIS *places the platter across his knee, and plucks at imaginary strings.*

Tell me, Juniper, is this not sweet to thine ears?

JUNIPER [*with a deep breath*]. Aye, Father, aye; it is beautiful.

FRANCIS. See now, Brothers; with his fleshly ear he hath heard nothing. Yet because I play the fool with him, the fool's heart respondeth and is joyful. And let me play never so ill, Sister Lute singeth not out of tune; but goeth nimbly and cunningly, doing all that I would have her do—

BROTHER ELIAS

because she is dumb, Brothers, and dead. So out of her, to these poor fingers that have no skill, come celestial harmonies such as ye never heard the like of tofore. And thou, Sister Lute, being so deaf and dumb and dead, hast done us great service; yea, for thou hast given us joy!

Sing again, Brothers!—Sing again! Sing, Leo! Sing, Angelo! Sing, Juniper!

[The playing of FRANCIS grows fast and furious; he starts singing a joyous exercise in phonetics, imitative of strings.]

Lal-a-lal, lal-a-lal! La, la, lah! etc.

[The Brothers join in, all singing their several parts. Into this riotous scene of head-swinging and tongue-wagging comes elderly BROTHER BERNARD, and gazes at them with mild astonishment.]

BERNARD. What are ye doing, Brothers?

FRANCIS. Playing the fool, Brother Bernard.

JUNIPER. Father Francis is teaching us.

BERNARD. Aye! So I think.

FRANCIS [*rising*]. Look at us, all fools, Brother; and I the greatest of them.

JUNIPER. O Father, art thou a greater fool than I?

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother.

JUNIPER. God help us! Is that true?

FRANCIS. Surely. For what fool was greater than I, when I took thee for my disciple?

JUNIPER. Ah! That's true, now! God be praised for it. He has said it, Brothers! There stands a greater fool than I. Oh! is he not beautiful?

[FRANCIS yokes himself with JUNIPER, and starts singing once more.]

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCIS. Praised be my Lord for all fools,
And namely praise for our Brother Ass ;
The ways of the wise He over-rules,
And mighty things He bringeth to pass !

Enter BROTHER GILES, clanging a large cow-bell.

FRANCIS. Little sheep, what is thy bell for ?

GILES. Feeding-time, Father. Your grass is waiting for you.

[He goes out, his bell ringing into the distance.

FRANCIS. Go to grass, little sheep, go to grass and eat well ! Ring them in, Brother Giles, ring them in !

[The Brothers pass into the refectory. JUNIPER goes last.

Brother Juniper.

JUNIPER. Aye, Father ?

FRANCIS. When thou prayest for Brother Elias, pray for me also.

JUNIPER. I will, Father.

[He takes FRANCIS'S sleeve, kisses it, and goes in to the refectory. FRANCIS remains with the wood in his hand. His fingers stray over it, and his voice begins faintly once more the same joyous refrain.

FRANCIS. Lal-a-lal ! Lal-a-lal ! La, la, lah ! . . .
Lal-a-lal, lah ! . . . Lal-a-lal, lah ! . . . La, la,
lah !——

[His voice breaks, he bows his face into his hands weeping. BROTHER ELIAS, followed by BROTHER RUFUS, comes quickly in and passes through to the refectory. BROTHER RUFUS halts, stands looking at the weeping FRANCIS, and beats his breast.

CURTAIN

THE SERAPHIC VISION



On a plateau of rock, high and precipitous, a small cell, roughly built of stones and timber, stands amid a group of pines and cypress-trees. Above the door is a narrow window slit; on the gable a wooden cross. A narrow foot-bridge of primitive construction connects the plateau and the foreground, which is formed of rough stones inter-

persed with juniper bushes. Below the foot-bridge is a precipice, from which emerge the tops of pines. When the scene opens it is dusk; the warmth of daylight has gone, and behind the cell the moon has not yet risen. BROTHER LEO stands alone by the foot-bridge, gazing toward the cell, the door of which is shut. BROTHER BERNARD enters hastily. BROTHER LEO raises a warning hand, without turning his eyes from the point on which they are fixed.

BERNARD. Ha! Brother Leo?

LEO. Hush! Speak low; speak low!

BERNARD. What canst thou hear?

LEO. Nothing! . . . Nothing!

BERNARD. Since when?

LEO. Alas, 'tis three days, Brother.

BERNARD. Thou hast been here?

LEO. Or Brother Angelo. We watch by turn:
And all this while silence as of the grave!

BERNARD. I will watch too.

LEO. My message found thee. When?

BERNARD. At yester-noon.

LEO. Thou hast been quick.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

BERNARD. Ah, Brother,
Do we not love him ?

LEO. He is more to me
Than life. God pardon me ! When I need comfort,
I speak *his* name.

BERNARD. Three days, thou sayest ? and all that
time no sound ?
Truly, he is within there, think you, still ?

LEO. He is there, Brother.

BERNARD. And yet liveth ?

LEO. Yea,
He liveth ! . . . Oh, fair Brother, pray for me !
I may not leave him. Yet am I afraid !

BERNARD. Why ? For what cause ?

LEO. Lest with these sinful eyes
I may behold a mystery too great !

BERNARD. God gave thee thine eyes, Brother.

LEO. Yea, and my heart
Also ; yet I do fear !

BERNARD. Hark, who comes here ?

LEO. 'Tis Brother Angelo ; he bringeth bread
Daily. . . . Ah, me !

*Enter ANGELO : he goes up to the door of the cell,
stands and makes a gesture of distress. He ex-
changes the loaf he carries for the one he finds there.*

ANGELO [*returning*]. Look, he hath eaten nothing !
What ? Brother Bernard ?

BERNARD. Aye. . . . This for three days !

LEO. He hath had no food for seven.

BERNARD. I will go in.

ANGELO. We may not.

LEO. So we watch helpless ! Shall it never end ?

THE SERAPHIC VISION

BERNARD. What surety have ye, Brothers, that
he lives still ?

LEO. I know ! I know !

BERNARD. How knowest thou ?

LEO. I have seen.

When all is dark, there within wakes a light !
And as a flame before the Sacrament
So through the night it burns, and fades at dawn.

ANGELO. I also have seen it, Brother.

BERNARD. Oh, what is here ?

'Tis marvel that thou tellest.

LEO. Why, so I think !

BERNARD. What else ? For surely in thy face
I read

More than thy speech reveals.

LEO. Well, thou shalt hear.

On the fourth day, as I watched here alone,—
Nigh spent, for Brother Angelo had not come,—
About this hour, I looked, and lo, the door
Wide, and he standing by it. Then I heard
His voice, ' Who art thou, Lord ? ' and then again,
' Who art thou ? ' and therewith such tender words
Of adoration as I may not utter.
Then said he, ' What am I ? O poor vile worm
That dieth, unworthy servant of my Lord ! '
And as I looked I saw come down from Heaven
A torch of fire most beautiful and bright ;
Over his head it rested ; and from the flame
Came forth a voice ; but of the words it spake
Naught could I understand.

BERNARD. And then ?

LEO. What else

I saw not : for by the brightness of that flame

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

Mine eyes were blinded, and fear shook my heart.
When I awoke, 'twas Brother Angelo
Stood by me ; and the place was dumb.

ANGELO. Here lying
I found him, Brother ; and when he opened eyes
He did not know me ; only afterwards
He told me this.

BERNARD. What mystery hast thou seen ?

LEO. I have seen holiness ; therefore am afraid.

BERNARD. Ah ! be not troubled, Brother ! Let
us pray,
God's light be in our eyes, and in our hearts.

Had we but hearts like this, what light were ours !
[*They kneel. Behind the cell the moon rises
among the trees. The window of the cell
lightens.*

ANGELO. Oh, see ! see !

LEO. Oh, is not that light—wonderful ?

BERNARD. Now the door opens.

ANGELO. Hush !

[*FRANCIS appears in the doorway. A pause.
He moves forward, rapt, with face raised and
arms stretched wide.*

FRANCIS. O Thou Lover of my soul, why dost
thou call me

Whither I cannot follow thee ? . . . [A pause.
Yea, I come !

I sleep ; but my heart waketh. 'Tis the voice
Of my Beloved, saying, ' Open to me !'
O my sweet Lover !

BERNARD. Nay, Brothers, let us go !
This is too holy a mystery for our ears.
Come, come, away !

THE SERAPHIC VISION

ANGELO [*softly*]. Father, God give thee peace !

LEO [*softly, with a gesture of valediction*]. Ah,
little Father, hold me in thy heart,

And pray for me !

BERNARD. Quick ! ere he speak, be hence !

[*They go out softly one by one. FRANCIS stands, rapt, then speaks with pauses. His voice is low and tender.*]

FRANCIS. I opened to my Beloved, but He was
gone. . . .

I sought Him, He could not be found. . . . I called. . . .

He gave no answer. . . . Be not Thou far off !

O Lord, my strength, haste Thee to succour me !

[*Slowly the radiance of the moon passes into cloud ; the form of FRANCIS becomes dim, only his face is discernible. As he speaks, a deep vibration of music begins, barely audible. Everything that surrounds him gradually fades away ; his body seems to stand no longer on earth but cloud.*]

I know, I know that my Redeemer liveth,

And at the last shall stand upon the earth.

Though with corruption worms destroy this body,

Yet in my very flesh shall I see God.

Him shall these eyes behold, and not another :

Yea, though He slay me, I will trust in Him.

[*A pause ; very faintly in the distance thunder is heard.*]

All things were made by Him. And without Him

Nothing was made that was made. In Him was

Life ;

And Life—the Light of men. And the Light shines

In darkness ; and the darkness knoweth it not.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

[Soft sheet lightning begins to play, but the thunder is still scarcely heard.]

That was the true Light, lighting every man
That cometh into the world. All flesh shall see it !

[A prolonged flash of lightning. After it the light grows brighter ; and a fuller music is heard, accompanied by thunder.]

O light of heaven, that with a million eyes
Dost visit space, a timeless traveller,
And wing-wide coverest the brief lives of men,
Say, hast thou seen the Passion of my Lord ?
O freshening air, that through a million mouths
Hast given to mortals breath,—air, which He
breathed

While yet on earth, and which my lips taste now,—
Say, didst thou taste the Passion of my Lord ?

O dust of the ground, trodden by feet of men.

O broken bread of clay, from which was made
Man in God's image, meek substance formed for all,
How hast thou shared the Passion of my Lord ?

O ye great hills, wherefor did ye mount up

High-headed into heaven to gaze on space,

If in that hour ye sought not Calvary ?

Say, saw ye then the Passion of my Lord ?

O ye green things of Earth, ye covering leaves,

And tender herb, and shaken grass, and flower,

Ye drops of dew, ye mists, and Sundering clouds,

Ye falling rains, and streams, ye downward torrents,

Ye firmamental tides which ebb and flow,

What part have ye in the Passion of my Lord ?

[The lightning becomes more incessant ; the air around him is charged with golden points of fire.]

THE SERAPHIC VISION

O winds, His ministers, O wheeling fires,
And charioteers of space which, at His will,
Do burn continually on unseen wing,
Legions on legions, angels that attend,—
Where hold ye hid the Passion of my Lord ?
Why doth not Earth sweat blood, if to her dust
From those dear Veins one drop did ever fall ?
Why runs not ocean red, since water washed
His Wounds for burial ? Why are not those thorns
Ruddier than rubies which once pierced His Brow ?
Oh, why is Earth still Earth, since He, from Heaven,
Her Maker cometh giving life to all ?

*[His utterance becomes swift. In the air about
him a mysterious commotion is seen, and the
lights no longer burn steadfastly: they gloom
and brighten again, as though unseen forms
were passing before them.]*

Ye, that with wing on wing
Your faces covering,
Do shroud the hidden thing
From the blindness of man's sight,
Undo, unloose again,
Holy and without stain,
His glory : let Christ reign,
And all be Light !
By birth, blessing, and bliss,
Creation did mean this,—
Form came for Love to kiss,
Making the whole world His !
To Chaos, a waste of shame,
Through night without end or aim,
Into the darkness came
His Word as a shaft of flame.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

In silence of night and sleep,
Through the void under, above,
Lo, the Spirit of Love
Moved on the face of the deep ;
He spake, and the Light did leap !
He saw, and it was done ;
He found for its fires a way ;
He parted the moon and sun,
And out of the night brought day.
He made new Heaven, new Earth,
And lo, where the Light did shine
Came living things to birth,
With music, and mouths of mirth,
And eyes to behold His worth,
And hearts to know Him divine.
Was not Creation this :—
By birth, blessing, and bliss,
Clasping His Feet, we kiss ?
We are hers ; she is His ; . . .
He is mine !

[As FRANCIS ceases, a golden rain is seen falling about him ; slowly the air begins to brighten with the coming of dawn. Music is heard and voices singing. He stands rapt and expectant.]

VOICES. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts,
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory ; Glory be
to Thee, O Lord most high !

FRANCIS. O Maker Christ, O Love made Flesh,
make me !

Fashion me in Thine image ere I die !
That I may know Thy Passion, let me be
Partaker of Thy pains ! Weak, weak I cry ;

THE SERAPHIC VISION

Oh, come Thou unto me !
I faint, for Thee I thirst. Now, lest I waste,
Let me be filled with thee ! Sweet Saviour, haste,
Lift Thou me up. . . .
Give me Thy cup . . .
To taste !

[A marvellous brightness falls upon the face of FRANCIS ; the air becomes blue and radiant. He stands in a golden shower, gazing intently before him. Slowly he lifts and extends his arms in the form of the Cross. His voice becomes faint with joy and ravishment.]

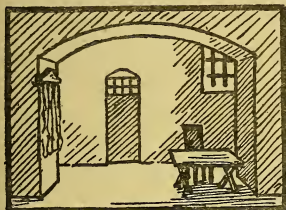
O Day-star from on high,
Out of yon Eastern sky,
How swiftly Thou dost fly ! . . .
And lo, with hands stretched wide,
Like my Lord, ere He died,
In form most glorified,
Thou comest ! . . .
From what height ?
O blessed, holy sight !
O Light of Light !

[He stands entranced in ecstasy. The dawn lies golden about him. From the world below comes a loud singing of birds. The mist fades and begins to disappear ; behind him is seen faintly the cell with its door open. Earth appears again. Slowly he lets down his hands, which bear the marks of the Passion.]

CURTAIN



BROTHER SIN



A large cell containing table, chair, stool, and writing materials. Before the crucifix, to one side of which hangs a curtain, BROTHER LEO stands in an attitude of deep dejection. BROTHER JUNIPER, entering from the outer door, halts abruptly and stands watching him. LEO beats his breast; his lips move fast in prayer, but no sound

comes from them. Suddenly he stops, and with a despairing gesture draws the curtain across the crucifix.

LEO. So—so shall it be with me for ever !

[Moving away, he sits down at the table, his head bowed, his hands clenched before him. JUNIPER, approaching softly, stands looking at him.]

JUNIPER. Brother Leo. . . . *[He waits : slowly LEO raises his head.]* Shall I tell thee what thou art ?

LEO. Aye ! If thou canst.

JUNIPER. Thou art a fool. *[LEO is about to speak.]* Here ! Do not answer ! for thy wits are better than mine : and if thou talk I shall be beaten. On holy obedience I charge thee, speak not till I have done ! Look at me : this is Brother Juniper—a fool, a numskull. Thou canst tell from my face that I have no brain. Had God not loved me, I had better never been born. When I weep, men laugh that I do it so ill : and when I laugh they are like to weep, I do it with so ugly a face.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

But God loves me ; and whether I laugh or weep,
He knows what I mean. . . . But 'tis not of
Brother Juniper I speak now. Thou moping fool !
[*Then, with softened voice*] Thou dear son of
Father Francis, whom he loves best of us all. . . .
[*LEO bows his head and the tears rush from his eyes.*]
Aye, weep, weep ! Thou dost well to weep ; and
canst do it better than I . . . but not with more
love, Brother . . . in thy heart.

[*LEO raises himself. With one arm he covers his
eyes ; the other he extends as if groping for
aid. JUNIPER continues to expostulate.*

What hast thou been doing to thyself, these three
weeks ? Aye ; ever since thou and he came back
from the mountain. Wast thou so mum to him up
there ? No wonder he fell ill of thy company !

[*LEO rises, and turns away.*

Well, this is all I would say to thee—then let thy
tongue be loosed. If thou do not open thy heart,
Brother Leo, thy heart will die.

LEO. It is dead already ; and by this time it stinketh.

JUNIPER. The Lord give me another nose, then :
for I smell it not !

LEO. O Brother Juniper, I thank God for thy
small wits and thy great heart ! To thee will I
speak. [*He crosses himself.*] In nomine Dei !

JUNIPER [*crossing himself*]. Name o' Jesus !

LEO. I look on Him whom I have pierced, but do
not love. My love is earthly ; so am I lost for ever !

JUNIPER. Name o' Jesus : say it again ! You
do not love our Father Francis ?

LEO. Would God I did not love him so well !
For when we worship the creature, then is the

BROTHER SIN

Creator not in us! . . . Brother Juniper, I have told thee my grief.

JUNIPER [*shaking his head*]. I cannot mend it, Brother: but Father Francis can. Open to him!

LEO. To him? I dare not!

JUNIPER. Then thou dost not love him.

LEO. O Juniper, I have seen a mystery done in him whereof I may not speak: therefore my heart is full of fear. For now he is made perfect, and full of light. But what he sees I cannot see. So, looking on him, I know that I am blind.

JUNIPER [*at a loss*]. Eh! I am a fool again, Brother, and have naught to say. Yet, could I lend thee some of my foolishness, 'twere easier for God to mend thy wits. [*He turns to depart, then faces about again.*] Brother Leo, give me thy blessing on what I am about to do.

LEO. What is that, Brother?

JUNIPER. I go to feed swine.

LEO. God be with thee, Brother, and give thee peace.

JUNIPER. And my swine also! Peace for them.

[*He waits till the other speaks.*]

LEO. . . . Yea; and thy swine also! [JUNIPER *goes out.*] But for me no peace. Darkness is upon my soul. Nowhere can I find Him. Ah, Father Francis, Father Francis, bring back to me the love of Christ!

[*The door of the inner cell opens. FRANCIS appears; he totters and leans upon the doorpost for support. His hands and feet are bandaged; when he walks it is with pain.*]

FRANCIS. Brother Leo, come and give me thy hand—for my feet fail me.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

LEO [*going eagerly to his aid*]. Let me carry thee, Father! Where wouldst thou be?

FRANCIS. Over there, Brother. [*He starts to walk.*] Three steps, . . . and three more . . . and then . . . only three more.

LEO [*tenderly*]. Sit down, Father.

FRANCIS [*seating himself*]. You, too, Brother Leo; I would have you write for me. Where is the scrip you made yesterday?

[*LEO goes and fetches it from a recess.*]

LEO. Here, Father.

FRANCIS. Read; what comes last?

LEO [*still standing, reads from the parchment*]. 'Therefore, let no man say "I love God," if he do not the will of God; or if he give not his body unto pain of death, that so God's will be done in him, if by infirmity he cannot of himself. So in his weakness shall the power of love be made known. . . .

[*As LEO reads, for grief of spirit his voice breaks.*]

FRANCIS [*after a pause*]. Was there no more, Brother? . . . Hadst thou written no more?

LEO [*with an effort*]. There is more, Father; but I cannot read it!

FRANCIS [*reaching up his hand for the MS.*]. Who was with thee just now? I heard voices.

LEO. Brother Juniper.

FRANCIS. God did well when He made Brother Juniper.

[*So thinks LEO, but the word cannot find utterance.*]
If thou art ever in doubt, Leo,—tell it to Brother Juniper: for God hath given him a simple heart. . . . Where is thy scrip? [*LEO gives him the MS.*]. Nay! it is written plain: why couldst thou not read it?

BROTHER SIN

LEO [*with an effort*]. I will read it, Father.

[LEO puts out his hand for the MS. FRANCIS retains it, sitting mazed in meditation.]

FRANCIS. Brother Leo . . . last night I saw one crucified, and bearing the pains of death—not for love, but for hate.

LEO. That was strange, Father.

FRANCIS. Yea, a great marvel : but strange are the ways of men. The face was a face I knew : one that I had loved well.

LEO. Who was that, Father ?

FRANCIS. Brother Sin.

[*With a quick instinctive gesture* LEO crosses himself.]

LEO. What like was he, Father ?

FRANCIS. He is like a leper, Brother : separate and cut off from his own kind. He crieth, and none heareth ; he is athirst, yet will not drink ; he is in darkness, yet will not look on light. He hath need, and knoweth it not. The love of God vexeth him, for the love of God will not let him go.

[*During this recital* LEO'S face shows an ever livelier emotion.]

Dost thou remember, Leo, how once thou didst wash the feet of a leper, because he so hated thee ?

LEO. Aye.

FRANCIS. So that, after, he hated thee no more.

LEO. That was long ago, Father. Now—he is in peace.

FRANCIS. Then I learned of thee, Leo. Then didst thou bring me nearer to Christ.

[LEO bows his head ; his breast is shaken by sobs, but he makes no sound.]

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

So would I wash the feet of Brother Sin,—because he hateth me.

[*There is a pause. FRANCIS sits lost in thought.*

LEO stands waiting ; his eyes are shut, as with a covert motion he beats upon his breast.

Leo, wilt thou go for me to Father Prior, Brother Elias, and say that I, little Brother Francis, do ask of him forgiveness and blessing. Say that were I not lame, I would come to him myself.

LEO [*accepting an order whose meaning he cannot fathom*]. I will go, Father.

[*Unseen by FRANCIS he pauses for a moment, as though about to throw himself at his feet, then goes quickly out. FRANCIS sits waiting : presently his eyes grow tranced.*

FRANCIS. Ah, Thou that lookest upon me through these eyes of hate, Lover of my life, depart not from me yet ! O Light, O Beauty, O Desire of mine eyes, out of the heart of this mine enemy come to me, that I with Thee, through him, may be made one ! Thee, whom I held bound, Thee will I release ; Thee, whom I feared, Thee will I trust. My Maker, my God, come down to me from Thy Cross, and be known to me—through the sins of men. This spear of doubt, these nails of fear, these thorns of envy, wherewith hate hath wounded Thee,—O Brother Sin, Brother Sin, turn not away—open thine eyes, that through them I may look on Him we have pierced !

LEO [*returning*]. He is not there, Father.

[*FRANCIS stays tranced. LEO kneels before him.*
O Father, what dost thou see ?

FRANCIS [*become dimly aware of him*]. Brother

BROTHER SIN

Leo, lay thy hand on me.

[LEO, *approaching on his knees, lays his hands on the heart of FRANCIS. With bowed head and face half-averted, he waits fearfully till FRANCIS again speaks.*

Brother Leo, often with these hands thou hast done wrong, yet now they comfort me. Often with thine eyes thou hast been blind, yet in them I see light. Often with thy tongue thou hast denied thy Lord: yet never hath He denied me thee. Often hast thou forgotten God; yet thou dost remind me of Him.

LEO. Father, thou dost break my heart! Ah, go from me! Go from me!

FRANCIS [*in tender surprise*]. Brother Leo!

[LEO *bows himself at the knees of FRANCIS, and breaks into passionate weeping. FRANCIS lays his hands on him.*

My son . . . what is thy trouble? . . . Now, on holy obedience, I charge thee tell it me.

LEO. To be near thee, Father!

FRANCIS [*after a pause*]. Go from me, Leo . . . if thou wilt.

LEO. I would not, Father.

FRANCIS. Then come nearer to me. . . . Look on me! Lift up thy head! . . . O Brother—little sheep—is it not strange that we, children of Love, look upon each other thus through eyes of flesh? For what parts us each from each—that we can see; but what joins us we cannot see. Had we been blind, with no eyes to separate us, we should have been nearer—in our infirmity. But now, because face looketh upon face, we seem to be twain.

LEO. That is true, Father. As *thou* seest, I can-

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not see. O Father Francis, where from my heart has gone the love of Christ ?

FRANCIS. Unto mine, Brother. For when He gave me thy love, He gave me His also. . . . Leo, give me thy pen. . . . And thy hand. . . . Now by thy hand I will write something. Shut thine eyes, little sheep . . . till I bid thee open them.

[*Guiding the hand of LEO, FRANCIS begins writing.*

Brother Pen goeth swiftly . . . this that we write pleaseth him. . . . Dost thou know what it is that we have written—thou, and I, and he ?

LEO. No, Father.

FRANCIS [*reading*]. ‘The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make His face to shine upon thee.

[FRANCIS *slowly rises*. LEO *kneels*.

The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. . . . Brother Leo, the Lord bless thee, as thou hast blest me.’ [*He gives him the parchment.*] When thou art in trouble show this to Brother Sin.

LEO. Brother Sin !

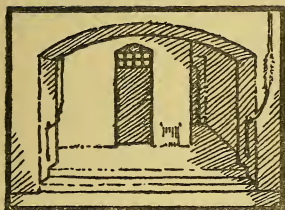
FRANCIS. Do not be afraid of Brother Sin. He is a leper ; but when thou hast washed his feet, then shalt thou see . . . in them . . . the wounds of Christ. Yea, when for us Christ died—with Him also died—Brother Sin.

[LEO *rises to his feet with a face of ecstasy.*

LEO. Now am I made whole ! . . . Ah, Maker Christ ! Maker Christ !

[*He goes back to the Crucifix, draws away the curtain, and kneels. FRANCIS, seeing him rapt in prayer, turns softly, and with great pain hobbles back to his cell.*

SISTER DEATH



Scene I. : Outside the cell of St. Francis.

Scene II. : Inside.

Both scenes have as their setting, or proscenium, a low broad archway extending almost the full breadth of the stage, with walls severely plain and unadorned, and side exits to right and left. Behind runs the breadth of a narrow corridor, to which

the floor rises by two steps set in the thickness of the wall. Beyond that is the exterior of St. Francis' cell, occupying an angle of the corridor. Over the door of the cell, to left-centre, is a grille, and between the door and the corner of the passage a low niche or bench. Before the foreground arch two bell-ropes descend from the roof, and are hitched to the wall on each side.

In Scene II. everything beyond the corridor is removed to make way for the interior of St. Francis' cell, which thus appears on a raised level above the foreground.

Scene I. : On the bench sits BROTHER JUNIPER, falling to sleep and jerking himself awake again. Enter BROTHER RUFUS: he unhitches the rope to the left, crosses himself and begins to ring for Angelus. Both before and while he does so, there has been knocking at the outer gate.

RUFUS [*as he rings*]. Ave Maria, gratia plena,
Dominus tecum.

[*The words go off into a mumble. JUNIPER, after trying mechanically to join in, desists: sleep overcoming him.*

Enter from the right, in haste, BROTHER HUMBLE, with keys hanging from his girdle. At his back

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the knocking repeats itself. Seeing BROTHER RUFUS, *he halts.*

HUMBLE. Brother Rufus.

RUFUS [*raising his voice a little, to indicate that he is doing a religious exercise, and is not to be interrupted*]. Sancta Maria, mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.

HUMBLE. Where 's Father Prior ?

RUFUS. Amen. . . . I know not, Brother.

HUMBLE. They 're at the gate again. The Father said I was to let in none.

RUFUS. Do as he tells you. That 's what he told me.

HUMBLE. They won't stop knocking.

RUFUS. Go, see who they are.

HUMBLE. I know already. They came yesterday. Now there 's more of them.

RUFUS. From Assisi ?

HUMBLE. Yes. All the road 's black with them.

RUFUS [*hitching back the rope.*] They 're waiting for the other bell to ring, to tell them that the Poverello 's dead ! Then they 'll feel safe, and sure of him.

HUMBLE [*going up to JUNIPER, and prodding him softly*]. Brother Juniper. . . . Is Father Prior in there ?

[JUNIPER *opens his eyes, looks at him without intelligence, and shuts them again.*

RUFUS. Leave him ! He 's worn with watching. Let him sleep !

HUMBLE. Then is the Poverello sleeping too ?

[*The knocking grows louder.*

RUFUS. If he were that would wake him. Come, come ! Get on !

SISTER DEATH

HUMBLE. Oh, me ! The world, the world ! Eh !
How it 's with us !

[*He goes out ; the knocking gets more insistent.*

JUNIPER [*starting up*]. What for 's that knocking ?

RUFUS. Ears that will not hear, deafer than yours
or mine. Nay, here he comes.

Enter the FATHER PRIOR, preceded by Brothers carrying beams of wood and crowbars. They cross from left to right, taking their instructions by a backward glance, to which the PRIOR replies by a gesture.

RUFUS. Father Prior, it 's the citizens again.

PRIOR. I know it, Brother.

RUFUS. There 's more of them now !

PRIOR. I know that also.

RUFUS. We shall need strong walls.

PRIOR. We have them. [*Loud knocking.*

RUFUS. And stronger gates.

PRIOR. Enough ! You need not fear.

RUFUS. There are more coming.

PRIOR. All the world may come ! They shall not
spoil us of him.

[*A fresh thunder of knocking. JUNIPER, who has risen at the PRIOR'S entrance, and has watched with apprehension the carrying of the beams, now stumbles forward and kneels at the side of his Superior.*

JUNIPER. O Father Prior ! Don't keep them
from him : let him die in peace !

PRIOR. Go back to your post, Brother.

RUFUS. Father, last night I was at the gate. She
that you spoke of came—the Lady Giacomina.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

PRIOR. At what hour ?

RUFUS. 'Twas midnight, Father.

PRIOR. Yes ?

RUFUS. I sent her away.

Enter BROTHER HUMBLE hurriedly. Seeing the FATHER PRIOR, he stops, makes obeisance, and waits permission to speak.

PRIOR. My son, what is it ?

HUMBLE. The citizens demand speech with you, Father.

PRIOR. They 'demand,' do they ?

HUMBLE. Aye. There's a great crowd. It's growing, Father.

PRIOR. Take others with you. Bid the crowd stand back ; then let in three.

[Exit BROTHER HUMBLE.

RUFUS. I think we shall need help.

PRIOR. Help is at hand. In the Sacristy we have arms.

JUNIPER *[kneeling at the door of the cell]*. O little lover of men, pray for us sinners now in the hour of thy death !

PRIOR. She came last night, you say ?

RUFUS. With her two sons :
In great haste, Father, having journeyed far.

PRIOR. Wherefor ?

RUFUS. Wishing to see him ere he died.

PRIOR. How did she know ? You did not send his letter ?

RUFUS. No, Father, no ! She said that she had heard the Poverello calling to her : ' Sister ! Sister Giacomina ! '—his very voice, Father !

SISTER DEATH

PRIOR. And you ?

RUFUS. I said that he was very near his end ; and could see nobody. ' Earthly things,' I said, ' he hath put away—all frailties, all affections, all desires,—giving himself to God.' As you told me, so I told her, Father.

PRIOR. What said she then ?

RUFUS. She wept. Oh ! very grievously she wept, begging to be let in. There, at the gate, I left her—weeping.

PRIOR. Thus, at the last, disguised in charity, the Devil comes tempting him,—seeking, by subtle ways of mortal weakness, to dim his glory.

Enter HUMBLE, followed by three Citizens, and several Friars : from the opposite side other Friars enter.

HUMBLE. Here they are, Father Prior.

PRIOR. Why have ye come ?

1ST CITIZEN. Shortly—to speak with you.

PRIOR. I heard that you had orders for me. No ?

1ST CITIZEN. Only to make request.

PRIOR. Well, let us hear it ?

1ST CITIZEN. The Poverello, Father ; lives he still ?

PRIOR. He lives ; he hath slept ; he is awake again. [*The Citizens exchange looks.*]

1ST CITIZEN. That is good news, Father Prior ; very good news. We come to see him.

PRIOR. Ye may not.

2ND CITIZEN. Out yonder they expect it.

PRIOR. I am sorry. Be patient awhile.

3RD CITIZEN. Patient ! Till when ?

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

PRIOR [*making the sign of the Cross*]. Till he be dead. If ye beheld him now ye would not know him.

2ND CITIZEN. But we should know the marks,—the miracle, Father.

3RD CITIZEN. Aye! Let us see those!

PRIOR. Adulterous generation! Ye seek a sign. But it shall not be given.

1ST CITIZEN. We seek naught but our own. His body belongs——

PRIOR. To God, Brother.

2ND CITIZEN. To Assisi.

3RD CITIZEN. Here was he born, and here shall he be buried!

1ST CITIZEN. Here in San Giorgio. The city demands it.

PRIOR. What is your fear?

2ND CITIZEN. A body gone to Rome!

1ST CITIZEN. Look: when he dies, he will become a saint: work miracles, and all the world will hear, and flock like crows. So, where the body lies, the glory of him will be.

3RD CITIZEN. And all the fame.

2ND CITIZEN. So give us surety—first that he bides here now; next that ye take him not, when he is dead, wholly away from us.

3RD CITIZEN. Nay, nor in pieces either! Ye would do that which in the wilderness was done with bread; and by your miracles so multiply him, till all our honour and profit of him be gone.

1ST CITIZEN. The body is ours, Prior; and we be here to see to it!

PRIOR. Living or dead, he is in God's hands, Brother.

SISTER DEATH

1ST CITIZEN. Aye, when we have the holding up of them! But now he is in yours, and in the hands of my Lord Bishop: and that means of Rome.

2ND CITIZEN. Thither he goes not!

[Murmurs are heard from the crowd.]

1ST CITIZEN. Hark! Yonder be men, hungry for what is theirs, and *shall* be theirs: else, from this place we stir not.

2ND CITIZEN. Nor shall any!

3RD CITIZEN. Whole or in pieces; be he alive or dead—he goes not hence! If here we find him not, we'll tear your roof down.

PRIOR. Enough! I'll hear no more. Hence, get you gone! *[The murmurs of the crowd increase.]*

1ST CITIZEN. Nothing comes out till we have seen the body.

PRIOR. Go: for ye shall not!

2ND CITIZEN. Take not too long over his dying, Father Prior! The people grow impatient.

PRIOR. Forth with these brawlers! Go! Bar up the gates!

[The Friars take hold of the three Citizens and begin thrusting them out.]

1ST CITIZEN. We are not gone, Prior!

2ND CITIZEN. We'll see you starve!

3RD CITIZEN. Bark! Bite!—Skin the whole pack of you! *[They go out, forced by the Brethren.]*

RUFUS. Of a truth, Father,—doth he yet live?

PRIOR. Aye, so,—by a great miracle. Come, Brothers, to the Sacristy; arm yourselves!

[JUNIPER runs forward and kneels before the

FATHER PRIOR.

JUNIPER. O Father Prior, let them come in!

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

Father Prior, let them come in! They have but to look on his face, they will be blest! Let them see him, and they will be satisfied.

[The FATHER PRIOR goes out, followed by others.]

LEO. Come, Brother. We must obey.

JUNIPER. No, no! They are killing him! If he hears tell of it, he'll die! Oh, don't die, Father dear! Don't die! Don't die!

[Exit LEO, JUNIPER kneels at the cell door.]

The Lord bless thee and keep thee, Father! The Lord make His face shine on thee! The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace, Father!

[A clattering of arms is heard. JUNIPER stops his ears, and bows weeping at the door of the cell.]

CURTAIN

SISTER DEATH



Scene II. : Inside the cell. FRANCIS lies stretched on a trestle bed, JUNIPER sits at the foot watching him. Across the window a curtain is drawn. One whole side of the cell lies open toward the corridor which runs between it and the arch.

FRANCIS. Brother Juniper.

JUNIPER. Aye, Father ?

FRANCIS. Where is . . . Brother Light ?

JUNIPER [*lifting a corner of the curtain*]. He 's here, Father,—looking at you.

FRANCIS. Draw—draw it, Brother! [JUNIPER *draws back the curtain.*] Welcome, Light! Oh, welcome, Light!

JUNIPER. Have you slept, Father ?

FRANCIS. In my life more times than I ought, Brother. So now I must pay back what I owe.

JUNIPER. Then you did not sleep, Father ?

FRANCIS. Sister Sleep came and looked at me, but could not stay.

JUNIPER. Are you in pain, Father ?

FRANCIS. All night long she was my comforter. She is here still.

JUNIPER. What will I do for you, Father ?

FRANCIS. Sing to me, Juniper.

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

JUNIPER. Mine is an ugly voice, Father.

FRANCIS. So is Brother Frog's; yet doth he praise God for it.

JUNIPER. Shall I praise God for my ugly voice?

FRANCIS. Often have I praised Him for it: it hath been very sweet to me.

JUNIPER. Our mouths are foul things, Father.

FRANCIS. So are our bodies; yet we thank God for them, and for our other afflictions also.

JUNIPER. Aye, so we do, Father. 'Tis a great mystery.

FRANCIS. Therefore, sing, Brother.

JUNIPER. What shall I sing?

FRANCIS. Of light, Brother, and water, and fire, and Mother Earth. Hast thou forgot what I taught thee?

JUNIPER [*making the sign of the Cross*]. In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.

Praised be my Lord for all being,
And namely praise for our Brother Sun,
Who bringeth us day and light for seeing;
With joy he cometh his course to run.

FRANCIS [*feebly, in a whisper, with pauses*].

Praised be my Lord for Brother Wind,
And air, and cloud, and calms of weather;
Whereby all creatures Thou dost bind
Into one fellowship together.

JUNIPER. Praised be my Lord for Brother Fire,
By whom comes light through the darkness long;
Warm, and pleasant, and dear to desire,
Mighty is he and very strong.

FRANCIS. Praised be my Lord for Sister Water;
Ever of service hath she been,

SISTER DEATH

Waiting on men, sweet running Water,
She is humble, and precious, and clean.

[*While he sings the rest of the Brothers enter very quietly, and move gradually nearer. They have concealed under their habits long daggers, maces and swords.*

JUNIPER. Praised be my Lord, for all who give
Pardon to others for His love's sake,

FRANCIS. And meekly endure in pains to live ;
In Him they rest, and in Him shall wake.

JUNIPER. Praised be my Lord for Sister Death . . .
No mortal body shall she spare. . . .

[*He begins weeping.*

FRANCIS. Brother Frog, why hast thou ceased
singing ?

JUNIPER. I cannot more, Father.

FRANCIS. Who is here ?

LEO. All of us, Father.

FRANCIS. All ? Wherefor ? Is it a feast ?

LEO. Not a feast, a vigil, Father.

JUNIPER [*weeping*]. O Father, for the love of
God, don't, don't go and leave us !

FRANCIS. We are all in God, Brother.

JUNIPER. Ah, you may talk, you may talk,
Father ! And I'm a sinner, and we be all sinners ;
—and the Lord isn't in us—not yet : only now and
again, maybe, when we aren't thinking of Him.

FRANCIS. Where is Father Prior ?

RUFUS. He is not here, little Father.

LEO. He has been called away. You wish to see
him, Father ?

FRANCIS. Aye !

LEO. I will tell him.

[*Exit LEO.*

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCIS. Juniper.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father ?

FRANCIS. Where is Sister Giacomina ?

JUNIPER. Surely, I know not.

FRANCIS. Did she not come ?

JUNIPER. No, Father.

FRANCIS. Last night—who came ?

JUNIPER. None that I know of, Father.

FRANCIS. There was a bell, and knocking at the gate ; and voices—I thought I knew.

JUNIPER. Ah ! Why must you choose to lie so nearby, Father : and hear all the ringing and the knocking ?

FRANCIS. Sister Bell hath a sweet sound.

JUNIPER. Aye ; to them that like hearing her.

FRANCIS. Sister Giacomina . . . why tarriest thou ?

[RUFUS *stands conscience-stricken: other Brothers kneel to pray. Enter GILES, bringing food.*

Father Prior hath not come ?

BERNARD. No, Father.

GILES. Here is food for you, little Father.

FRANCIS. Not yet, little Brother. . . . Other sheep I have, not of this fold ; them also must I bring.

GILES. Nay, but for our sake, Father, so that we may have joy in thee. Eat, I pray thee, of thy son's venison.

FRANCIS. Bleat not, little sheep ! . . . When I eat . . . ye shall all eat with me. . . . Brother Rufus.

RUFUS. Father ?

FRANCIS. When thou art at the gate, I bid thee think always of sweet Sister Charity. . . . Brothers, why are ye so silent ?

SISTER DEATH

BERNARD. We were praying, Father.

FRANCIS. I pray that your prayers be all answered.

[RUFUS utters a sharp sob, stumbles forward, and kneels down before FRANCIS.]

RUFUS. Father . . . I was at the gate last night but had not charity.

FRANCIS. Wast thou so, Brother ?

RUFUS. Ah, pardon me that I did not bring thee good !

FRANCIS. Good is with God, Brother.

RUFUS. Ah, pardon that I failed not to do thee harm !

FRANCIS. What harm, Brother ?

RUFUS. I sent her away, Father ! She came, and I sent her away !

FRANCIS. Who ?

RUFUS. Sweet Sister Charity, and the Lady Giacomina.

FRANCIS. Sister Giacomina ! . . . Now I know thy mind was to be with me. . . . Brother, I thank thee for thy news. Thou hast given me—joy. . . . How seemed she ?

Re-enter BROTHER LEO.

RUFUS. Very eager, Father, very sorrowful, and tender to any word of thee. Two young men, her sons, stood by her. I left them weeping.

FRANCIS. Welcome, Sister Tears ! . . . Brothers, leave me alone awhile. Do not go far ! Juniper, stay near me.

[*They retire to the forecourt.* JUNIPER stays between.]

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

JUNIPER. You will take care of yourself, Father ?

FRANCIS. Sister Care will be with me.

JUNIPER. Make thy peace with her, Father ; for often thou hast neglected her.

FRANCIS. So I will, Brother.

[*Kneeling in the forecourt, the Brothers begin praying. Now and then between the words of FRANCIS, the deep mutter of their praying is heard, beginning loud and dying away.*]

BROTHERS. Domine, Domine, Deus salutis meae, in die clamavi, et nocte coram te : intret oratio mea in conspectu tuo, Domine ! Ostende mihi, Domine, misericordiam tuam !

FRANCIS. Sister Care, come and let me see thy face ! Why art thou so worn, and sorrowful ? Surely thou hast wept long, and hast neither eaten nor slept. Go to sleep, Sister Care ! I will watch over thee.

Enter FATHER PRIOR. He stands behind for a while ; JUNIPER, by signals, informs him that FRANCIS has asked to be left alone. He kneels, facing away from FRANCIS toward the kneeling Brotherhood.

BROTHERS. Redime me, Domine, et miserere mei. Exaudi, Deus, orationem meam, et ne despexeris deprecationem meam ; intende in me, et exaudi me. Aufer a me iniquitates meas.

FRANCIS. Ay, come, be not afraid ! Hide not thyself from me now ! Come, Sister Pain, let me look on thee, let me taste thy breath. Ah, thou art heavy, thou art heavy upon me, Sister Pain. Pity thy poor ass that stumbles because of his load ! Lo,

SISTER DEATH

to left, lo, to right, where shall I turn me now ? O Angel of the Lord, which standest before me in the way,—O flaming sword, why keepest thou me from Paradise ? Have I not loved thee enough, Sister Pain ? Have I not learned all things from thee, whose eyes did look into the eyes of my dying Lord, —yea, the lips, yea, the eyes, yea, the sweet breast ! O Christ, Thou lover of men, Thou lover of men !

PRIOR. Now cometh he to the Cross. Now is he with Christ !

BROTHERS. Corpus Domini nostri, Jesu Christi, custodiat animam meam in vitam aeternam.

FRANCIS. Yea, this is a field, and these be flowers that I see ! Pluck not these, Brother, which have but one limb to hold up heads to the light. Give them thy hand, Brother, give them thy hand !

PRIOR. Now he doth look upon Paradise.

BROTHERS. Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi.

FRANCIS. Brother Juniper !

[He tries to lift himself but fails.]

JUNIPER. Father ?

FRANCIS. Thou art simple, Brother Juniper, but thou art wise.

JUNIPER. I was never wise, Father ; God forbid !

FRANCIS. Thou didst speak truth to me, when I would not hear.

JUNIPER. Did I so, Father ?

FRANCIS. For now is my body past use, and yet I live. . . . Brother Ass, I have been too hard on thee !

JUNIPER *[weeping]*. I told thee of it, Father. Often I told thee !

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

FRANCIS. Bear me—bear me out into the light.

[*They come and carry his bed out into the space before the cell.* JUNIPER *kneels weeping at his side.*

FRANCIS. Father Prior . . . [*The PRIOR comes and stands near him.*] I pray you lift my hand and lay it on the head of this Juniper. [*The PRIOR does so.*] The Lord hath set His mark on thee. [*JUNIPER retires.*] . . . Brother Leo. . . . [*LEO comes forward and kneels, the PRIOR assists the hand of FRANCIS.*] . . . The Lord bless and keep thee! The Lord make His face to shine on thee! . . . [*LEO retires.*] . . . Brother Bernard. [*The same action is repeated.*] . . . Brother Giles. Bleat not, little sheep! . . . Brother Conrad. . . . Brother Matteo, the Lord strengthen thee! . . . Brother Rufus, the Lord open to thee! . . . Brother Simon. . . . Brother Angelo. . . . Brother Jerome, the Lord be a light unto thee. . . . Brother John. . . . Father Prior—Brother Elias, I thank thee!

PRIOR [*kneeling*]. Bless me also, O my Father!

FRANCIS [*taking the cord of the PRIOR's girdle, and kissing it*]. The Lord hath given thee my flock: be thou its blessing! . . . Ah, now cometh Sister Joy! Take thou my hand and lead me, so that I may see light! [*The sun shines full on him.*] See, oh, see! He cometh, He cometh!

O Brother Sun,
Rejoicing, thou dost run
Unto all lands!
Therefore, I bid thee take
This heart in thy hands,
Of a poor little one
Whose journeyings are all done.

SISTER DEATH

BROTHERS. *Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam, etc.* (Psalm 51.)

FRANCIS. And when thou dost make
To rise from thy wings
A new East, and dost wake
(For our dear Lord's sake),
Where new day begins—
Beast, reptile, and bird,
Cattle, and herd,
And all creeping things ;
Then cry for me
Unto all thou dost see,—
' On a Tree of great mercy
Christ died for thee ! '

BROTHERS. *Domine, clamavi ad te : exaudi me : intende voci meae, cum clamavero ad te, etc.* (Psalm 140.)

FRANCIS. Strong are its roots
All storms to stem ;
Twelve manner of fruits
Its branches do bear
For all that draw near ;
Yea, yea, and the leaves,
Though all men be thieves,
He giveth, nor grieves,
For the healing of them.

BROTHERS. *Eripe me, Domine, ab homine malo ; a viro iniquo eripe me. Domine, Domine, virtus salutis meae, etc.* (Psalm 139.)

FRANCIS. O Brother Sun,
How swiftly thou goest
The way thou knowest,
Now my day is done !

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

Bear me in the beams
Of thy light as it streams
From East unto West,
Till I come to the Breast
Of the Life I love best !
There shall I find rest.

BROTHERS. De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine :
Domine, exaudi vocem meam. Si iniquitates ob-
servaveris, Domine, Domine, quis sustinebit ?

[*The Friars cease praying. Outside is heard a
murmuring of the crowd.*]

FRANCIS. Now see I the Body of Christ multi-
plied for men ! Not as bread, nor on the altar doth
it show : but in the homes, and the highways and
the market-places, manifest through flesh and
blood. . . . This is His Body which was given for
me.

BERNARD. Look ! He hath a vision !

FRANCIS. Bread ! Give me bread, Brother !

[*GILES brings bread. FRANCIS takes, and breaks
it as he is speaking.*]

O Lord, Lover Christ, when saw I Thee hungry, or
sick, or poor, or in prison, and have not ministered
unto Thee ?

[*A breath of wonder escapes the listening Friars.*]

PRIOR. Peace !

[*The murmurs of the crowd grow louder.*]

FRANCIS. This I break . . .

This take . . .

For Love's sake !

[*He holds out the bread toward them. The Brothers
take off their sandals and approach, each in
turn to receive kneeling the bread he offers them.*]

SISTER DEATH

FRANCIS. Take. . . . Take. . . . Take. . . .

Enter BROTHER HUMBLE, running.

HUMBLE. Father Prior, Father Prior! . . . They are crying for him, Father; they are tearing at the gates!

PRIOR. Go! Quickly—some of you!

FRANCIS. Take. . . . Take. . . . Take. . . .

[The Brothers who have received their Communion begin to go out. Cries are heard: 'Bring out the Poverello! Bring out the Poverello!'] The shoutings and confusion increase.

JUNIPER. O Father, he's dying; he's dying, Father! Don't fight for him! Let him die in peace!

FRANCIS. Take. . . . Take. . . .

PRIOR [*with a sudden inspiration*]. Toll the bell, Brother!

[JUNIPER, weeping and beating his breast, runs to the bell and begins tolling it. As he does so the noise of clamour ceases; a moan of love and tenderness rises from the crowd and dies away.]

FRANCIS. Take. . . . Take. . . . Take. . . .

[He falls back exhausted as he comes to the last.]
O Bread of Life! O Body of Love! O Maker of men!

[The tolling of the bell goes on. The voice of the crowd is heard, chanting the 'De Profundis.']

FRANCIS. Open! Open the gates of Righteousness!

RUFUS. He bids me open the gate, Father! O Father, let me open the gate!

PRIOR. Open! Let them come in!

[Exit RUFUS, running.]

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

Earthly weapons shall not avail us now. Lay by your arms, Brothers.

[JUNIPER stops tolling, and stands rapt, expectant.
The rest kneel.

FRANCIS. Take! . . . I thank. . . . I thank. . . .

PRIOR [*kneeling at the feet of FRANCIS*]. Give us thy blessing, Father, for we are sinners!

FRANCIS. O Word made Flesh! O Body of Love!
O Maker of men! Take! . . .

[*He tries to speak further, but fails.*

PRIOR. Yea, tell us, Father!

FRANCIS. Man is His making, Brother! Man is His making!

PRIOR. Aye: till by man came sin.

FRANCIS. His making: He in us!

PRIOR. So pray, that He may bring us to His keeping!

FRANCIS. Without . . . man . . . Christ . . . were not . . . made.

PRIOR. Thou speakest mystery. We cannot understand.

FRANCIS. Without . . . man . . . Christ . . . were not . . . made. Without . . . man . . . [*The death struggle begins.*]

*Re-enter Brothers, followed by the crowd;
all bare their heads and kneel.*

PRIOR [*making the sign of the Cross*]. Requiem aeternam dona ei, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat ei.

[*All cross themselves and wait in silence. The sun sinks, and the stage darkens.*

FRANCIS. Welcome, Sister Death!

[*He stretches out his arms: BROTHERS LEO and*

SISTER DEATH

BERNARD *support him. He stays motionless for a while. It grows darker. He rises in their arms with a last effort.*

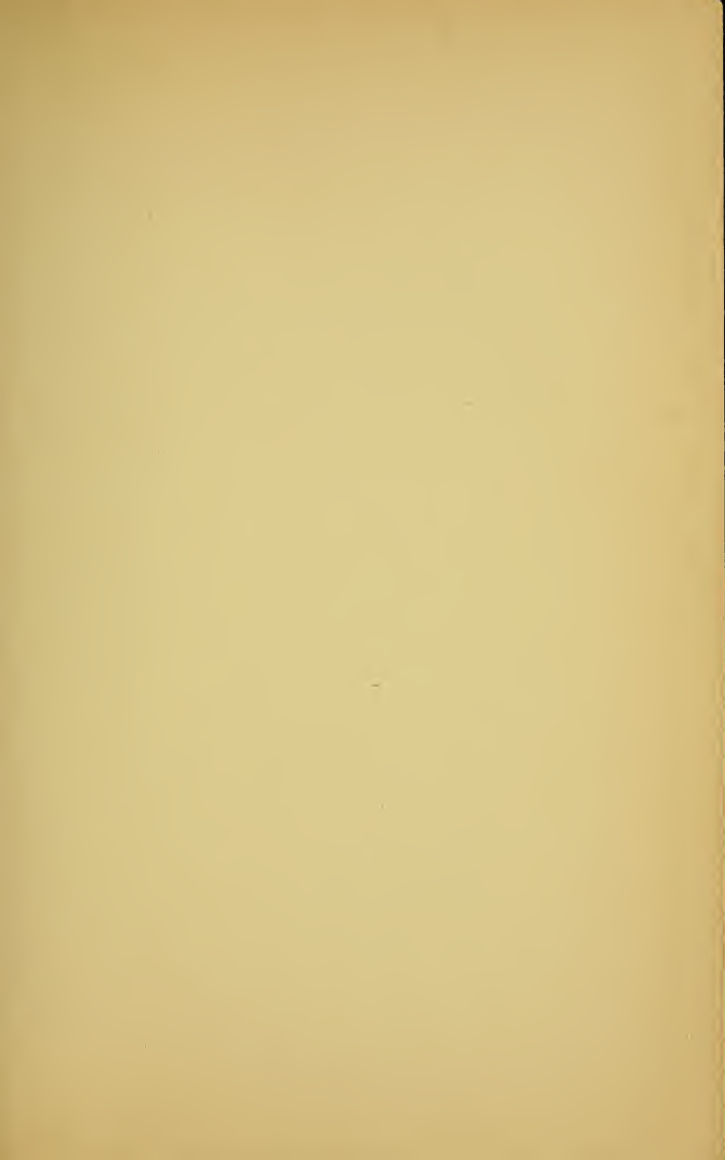
Welcome, Brother Sun ! [*He falls back dead.*]

CURTAIN

*Before the Curtain comes one of the Brothers,
and speaks.*

O Brother Sun,
Rejoicing, thou dost run
Unto all lands !
Therefore, I bid thee take
This heart in thy hands,
Of a poor little one
Whose journeyings are all done
And when thou dost make
To rise from thy wings
A new East, and dost wake
(For our dear Lord's sake),
Where new day begins,—
Beast, reptile, and bird,
Cattle, and herd,
And all creeping things ;
Then cry for me
Unto all thou dost see,—
' On a Tree of great mercy
Christ died for thee !'





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